

Boy in the Sun

*"Here's to the lie that the world was made
for other than one's perfect pleasure."*

One

Wycliffe? Lollards? Yeah, that's right. Perfect pleasure. All the rest of it, ridiculous to the extreme.

Is this a journal? Diary? Report? Testimony? Letter? Broadcast? Is it being read by millions in real time or will my next keystroke delete it in its entirety? A large-scale weapon or non-existent? An important historical document or a bit of dust on an anonymous floor, I'm not sure.

I want to brief you on my present circumstances. I'm being held in an unknown location. I was taken from my home for a few days? Weeks? I don't know, some time ago. The room I'm in is a perfect rectangle, approximately 15 feet by 30 feet. It has no doors, windows, or openings of any kind, other than a few small slits in the floor, walls, and ceiling; air vents that randomly, intermittently change from intake to outtake. The furnishings are spare but comfortable. There is an easy chair that reclines, a large bed, a desk, a dresser, a small circular dining table, a toilet, and sink. The lighting glows into the room from where the walls and ceiling meet. I have no control over the lighting or room temperature; they change slowly, but not regularly. It remains dark enough for a good night's sleep, and light enough for reasonable periods of wakefulness. I have a laptop computer that wirelessly charges quickly if I place it inside an outlined square on the floor beside my bed. It has no speakers, camera, or recording capability. What I can do on the computer is limited. I am writing this on it now.

There is a small hamper, a container; and a box with a smooth surface (the entire room is made of some kind of something like plastic or vinyl, I'm not sure, really... but things are smooth and sturdy and monochrome.) I can place my clothes, dishes, or anything else in this and an exchange occurs while I'm asleep. Fresh clothes, food, toiletries, etc. I believe my sleep is aided by a gas coming through the air vents, or other means, as I have not been able to witness this or figure out how it happens. A trap door? - it's not apparent. I will go more into my living conditions later.

Overall, it's more than satisfactory. But it is quiet. The only sound is an intermittent, low-pitched hum. The duration varies. I believe this has to do with the environmental controls. An energy source. About a half-dozen times, I have also heard what I believe is a jet, missile, or rocket launch. It's faint and distant sounding, but distinct. I listen intently every time it happens, hoping to figure out what it is, where I am, etc.

Who am I and why am I being held?

I am an organizer involved with the Labor Movement, affiliated with a large, loose network of activist collectives. I am male, 24 years old, and of the majority, with a privileged background and status. My family is prominent and powerful. My parents are chairpersons of top-echelon political committees. My parents' siblings hold similar positions in opposing parties.

The Zeitgeist is fraught with conflict, disinformation, anger, and suffering. I believe I was abducted because of my subversive activities, which are tipping public sentiment toward the disenfranchised and exploited. War, famine, and disease have become increasingly toxic and brutal. The distribution of wealth is wildly out of balance. The Poor are many and have had enough. The Rich have closed ranks and grasped Power absolutely.

Since being taken, I have had no contact with anyone. I assume I am being surveilled all the time. Whereas this missive is being monitored, my compatriots may have hacked in and are accessing and distributing this as I write. I am in the dark as to the degree of attention being paid by anyone, but I do know that I am supported widely by many across the globe and whoever took me has to keep that in regard moment to moment. How they treat me, how long they keep me, what they do with me...all that is very delicate, chock full of history and entanglements.

My hope is that they are regretting their actions, and vigorously debating their limited options for what to do next.

What am I to do next? The time before this was disorienting and confusing. I feel like I am just now coming up for air, and able to regain some composure and thoughtfulness. Keeping a log on this machine seems appropriate, whether it's being monitored or will be destroyed, being used as propaganda, or is just a scratch on the wall of a prison cell. The benefits outweigh the risks. Do they? It serves as a timekeeper if nothing else. My sense of time has been diminished significantly by my predicament. It's all I can do to move from one moment to the next, to maintain my calm, to negotiate my sanity with some control. How much time has passed? How much time will pass? I sleep soundly. Once again I submit that I'm breathing in something periodically that enhances and deepens the experience of rest. Is that also messing with me? My consciousness? I'm in solitary confinement. As comfortable as that might be, it still is slowly debilitating.

For now, I'm physically healthy. The food I receive is delicious, well prepared, and plentiful. No tub or shower, but I make do with the toilet and sink, the linens and towels and clothes. I do a bit of stretching and calisthenics and I feel fine in body, mind, and spirit, for now.

Should I make a practice of this? That seems prudent. I have nothing to do but wait. Should I try to disengage from speculating as to what might happen next? Does anything happen next? If whoever took me can assure those concerned for me that I'm being well treated, it seems this situation could go on indefinitely. Whatever action either side takes, however small, could have profound consequences. To say this probably quickly evolved into an intractable, open-ended stalemate is, well, probable. They must have thought through the implications of the kidnapping. Is it an arrest? They. I need to think about who they are and what they might do next. Prepare for it. "They" is probably my Father's brother and his organization. Their relationship is sticky, murky, conflicted, and filled with love and hate. Maybe he didn't authorize the abduction. Maybe he is keeping me alive. Maybe I'm unknowingly being martyred by my own people. Maybe my parents are behind this. Maybe some force I am unaware of is doing this. A dream? No.

I will think more about this and more about what's here and now. What's here and now. What I have and what I don't have.

I have this laptop computer. It works well. What I can and can't do on it is interesting and perplexing. I have no audio or video capabilities, so no music, no movies, no radio or spoken word programming. The search engine and browser are strangely censored. I need to go in-depth about this here, but I am still not sure about its mechanisms, its redactions, its inclusions, and how that is processed and presented minute to minute. Overall, I think I'm being gaslit by it, but I'm trying to move forward, disregarding that, if only because it is my sole source of information, amusement, and distraction. There are books, magazines, and other digital texts of various types. I can search, but that search is odd in its results. The hyperlinks go to non sequitur virtual spaces. I will make a chess move against what I assume is AI, and it will jump to a page about some historical event that has nothing to do with chess, royalty, battle, or anything else related to it. The randomness of the operation of the computer is, in a way, not random. Like I'm being toyed with. Or it's just some glitchy AI spitting out results it can't even justify, mathematically or otherwise. A conceit to think I'm being monitored at

all. Maybe someone just threw me in a hole, sealed me off, and is unconcerned about anything I do. I hope that a friend has figured out a way to hack this machine and that they are with me and are trying to locate me and mount an escape mission.

Escape. That seems unlikely from this end. The room is something in terms of its design and function.

I can read. I can look at still images. Is the news real? Are the images real? Should I continue to use it with the minimum of caution I now employ? Is it a smarter choice not to use it? Do the benefits outweigh the risks? I have to think about this and investigate this. I need to organize my thoughts. I have a to-do list of problems I have to solve a mile long. When I come across an anomaly, I need to make a note of it in my mind.

So I have a computer. I have my health and sanity. I have delicious food to eat. My last meal was a large steak, a loaded baked potato, and steamed broccoli. Easy enough to find out my diet preferences, I guess. It seems like they have. The food, fresh clothes and linens are my only connection to whatever is outside this room.

What I don't have. I'm alone. I have no contact with anyone, friend or foe. I'm not sure I have the tools to deal with this for any extended period. I have never been alone before. I realize now what a coddled existence I have had. Yes, I'm an important cog in an enormous wheel that is slowly turning towards something positive, and yes, that inertia has been challenging. But my life has been filled with love, camaraderie, solidarity, and joy. All my needs, physical, mental, and spiritual, have been provided for in what I would call a fortunate life. Very fortunate. More fortunate than most.

The lighting is dimming now. I am ready for sleep.

I can't sleep. Awful day. In our infinite wisdom, we've decided to kidnap a famous person, throw him in solitary for an indefinite period, and eventually show him all that we have been doing. And of all the people, it has been decided that I will be his first contact and main liaison as we try to clumsily roll out our grand scheme to him and the rest of the planet. Really? That's the plan? Me?

Would it help me to briefly summarize how we got here? Will I be asked to write a detailed report about all of this? Do I want some record of this craziness for myself? Since I can't sleep, I might as well string a few sentences together in the vain hope of calming me down.

Ok, that's a start. This activity never would have occurred to me if not for our detainee, our guest, engaging in it. Journal? Log? Letter? Anything and everything archival in nature happens automatically in the background here. Record keeping? Of any kind? Huh? It's just not something we even think about. We have memories and a past, but it's not important. The present crowds out the past and the future. Nostalgia. To reminisce. It just wouldn't occur to me.

So I'm to read this writing at a later date and reflect upon it? Learn something from it? This is a crazy time, and there is a sense of urgency and gravity that is new and hard to negotiate. I'm going to put aside the fact that I don't know what I'm doing and proceed.

About a dozen of us decided to get together and chat. About the turmoil happening worldwide and if some action should be taken by us. Things were coming apart at the seams. Wealth disparity. Political upheaval. Toxic forces, tangible and intangible, were blanketing the Earth as an avalanche blankets a mountainside. Our world, the one we had been building away from all that was thriving. We were beginning to flirt with the idea of sharing it somehow. We were in our infancy, yet we had something that had been developed for generations. We were getting good at it. Channeling our new technologies, energy, and systems in a functional way. Ready or not, now seemed to be the time to move forward. Invite the world to our table. We needed a plan. A first step. Someone suggested that we start with one person. Whisper our secret into one ear and see how that goes. They could help us with the rollout when the time came. Be an initiated representative, extolling the benefits and potential of our way, our resources, and our practice. That's how it began. Several chats. Different people. Ideas freely shared.

Who would that one person be? Someone famous made sense. They would be listened to, trusted, and respected by a wide swath of the population. Someone famous already aligned with our ideals and hopes.

Do we just knock on their door, hand them Pandora's box, and wish them luck? How do we eliminate any problems and difficulties, right from the start, keeping things from spinning out of control? It was in our nature to keep things under wraps. How and where we live was unknown, and that took a great effort for many years, many generations. When you pop the champagne, there's an explosion. How to keep the bubbles off the ground and into one's mouth?

What if you just took the person? From their home. Without anyone seeing. If we just had them with us, quickly, that would eliminate a lot of potential problems. Quickly. We don't do Quickly. Ever. For any reason. But now, all around us, everywhere, things were happening very quickly and we saw that if not for the speed and inertia, these changes wouldn't be emerging. Not good at Quickly, but good at being open-minded and adaptable. Trusting our instincts is something we don't question. We decided to kidnap, just use the word, kidnap, whoever our guest was going to be.

We tasked two or three volunteers to dig around for potential candidates, and one man kept rising to the top of the lists, long and short. Famous. Young. A labor organizer. Very attuned to our way of thinking. Well, close enough. Open minded, anyway.

We surveilled him for a while. We figured out the best way to grab him. He lived alone in an urban condo. Easy enough. When no one was looking, we would enter his dwelling, put him in a vehicle, and bring him here. That's what we did.

Now we are back to not quickly. This is new to me, writing things down in this way. Should I feel free to rant? No one knows I'm doing this. Is this solely for my consumption? Will this remain private? It becomes frustrating sometimes how deliberate we are, and how long everything takes. We celebrate our free minds, and our ability to improvise and play. We don't overthink things most of the time. So when something monumental comes along, like all this, we are at a loss, and we remain silent and inactive out of an inappropriate abundance of caution and civility. We are carefully considering what to do next. The problem with that is that our guest is in solitary without a clue of what's happening to him. He's comfortable. A small apartment. Nice bed. Plenty of food and water. We decided to give him a laptop with limited capability. Give him something to do. After a few days, he decided to write like this. He is completely disregarding the fact that we might be able to follow his every keystroke, and that is interesting to me. So interesting that I've decided to do it myself. How do I feel about us reading what he writes? Awful. Seems like a violation. What purpose does it have? We vetted him pretty thoroughly before we took him. Let's give him space and respect. Let's say hello to him. Greet him. Talk with him. In person. Now. This request has been rejected. Ignored. We took him without knowing what to do next. We have not come to a consensus about next steps. Not even close. I see this as a sophomoric Achilles heel that rears its ugly head quite often. A true weakness in our methods. As nimble and spontaneous as we can be, we spend much of our time fumbling around in the dark. It's a price we pay for our Detachment, with a capital D. That's our way.

We have decided that it will be me who has first contact with him. Not comfortable with this, but it does make sense. We all play many parts, share roles, and bounce between various tasks and responsibilities daily, but it would be fair to say that my main role is that of a liaison, representative, facilitator, concierge, manager, coordinator, and arranger. I spend much of my time interacting with our volunteers. I solve problems. I am a shoulder to cry on. In a world of silence and separation, I act as a light connection, a salve, a catalyst. I chose this. I like it. It suits me. Most of the time. All my activities are completely voluntary and cooperative, as is everyone else's. That's one thing we get right. Work. Play. We don't make that distinction. We engage in activities that feel rewarding and satisfying. All the time.

I am anxious to get started. I am preparing for this. Why is tomorrow not a good time? I have not gotten an answer to this question. Other than the tacit unspoken response that we always take our time with these kinds of decisions. Someone did say that we should have thought this through a little better and that we need a better plan and strategy moving forward. We need to make big decisions more quickly and resolutely. I agree with that.

So. Stand by. Keep preparing for first contact. Be brave when offering up ideas. Be open to what might come next. Trust your intuition. I think I will make this writing a regular exercise. I will keep it a secret. I will lose sleep. But that's ok. Just this short session has pointed me towards the benefits of this activity.

Two

"It is imperative to write invulnerable sentences."

Impervious to irony or anything else, is what Hugo Ball wrote. Well, there you go. I will strive to do that here.

The good news is that I have access to some of my files from my home computers and personal hard drives.

The bad news is that I have access to some of my files from my home computers and personal hard drives.

It'll be good to go back over some of my stuff. I can't dwell on the fact that my life has been completely exposed. And to whom? I think I know, but I don't know. I only finished school a year ago, and my activities related to the Labor movement have been non-violent and legal. My connections to various associates are obviously laid bare, and some of their activities could be construed as crimes and certainly subversive and counter to what the Powers that be desire. It could be that my organization has denied my existence completely. There could be no one looking for me or fighting for my release. It could be that my plight is well-known throughout the world. A large team of lawyers and investigators could be close to getting me released. I have to put all this aside and keep myself alive and healthy.

Solitude. That is the enemy at the moment. Not bad for now, but it will begin to play tricks on my mind and wear on my spirit. Delicious food again today. An omelet with sausage, spinach, and cheese...perfect! It is a trick, the exchange made of dishes and laundry. For the first time I was awake for this. The lights go completely black. There is some mechanical humming of various pitches. When I tried to feel my way towards the bin in the dark, there was a small, spherical, magnetic field keeping me from it. Lights back on and viola! Hot food, clean clothes, new tube of toothpaste. The technology involved with this space leads me to believe that whoever is keeping me here has virtually unlimited resources.

I am at the fault lines between powerful opposing forces. I know I have been effective on the ground for the last few months. Our numbers have grown exponentially. Concessions have been made. Working conditions, wages, time off, a seat at the table...these things are improving. My confinement speaks to the success we are having. I believe that.

What to do? What action can I take moving forward? My options are limited. Even if I found my way out of this room...what lies beyond is obviously large and secure. Back in the hole quickly. If they want some type of negotiation, concession...that's on them at this point. I really am a rat in a cage. Rat in a cage that gets a piece of cheese occasionally. What a piece of cheese it is! Eat, sleep, wait.

Wait. Wait for what? How do I force their hand? Oh no...why didn't I think of this earlier? Too terrifying a prospect, I guess. I could stop eating. Hunger strike. If they just read that, I hope it caused a tremor...can they just knock me out and force feed me? I suspect they release some kind of gas into the air to put me to sleep, but I don't know that. What if they aren't? Would they just force feed me? What if that got out? Solitary. Force feeding. These things are torture. They can't afford to be accused of torture. Bold of me to think of myself as a martyr. I am not strong enough to starve. What would it accomplish? Are all these private thoughts public? It helps to think in this way, out onto the page, but should I be maintaining a more courageous front? Should this space be more of a political manifesto? From a hero? I'm

not a hero. Until recently, my life has been anything but heroic. Top university. Plush apartment in the heart of a vibrant, beautiful city. Fat bank account. Want for nothing. Friends. Family. Good work to do. I dipped my toe into the pool of activism, and now I am here. Contemplating starvation. Unsure of my ability to do that. Greatness thrust upon you. I just wanted to help.

I wouldn't last very long without eating. I need to put that aside for a bit. It would be good for me to look over some of my files, my notes. I wonder what I will have access to? All of it? Gaslit. How am I being manipulated?

“Pessimistic intellect. Optimistic will.”

Wrote that down as soon as I saw it. Gramsci. There's a man who wrote from prison to great effect. This really sums it up for me. You need to maintain a healthy skepticism of all things. But that shouldn't stop your heart. You need both. You need to be grounded in reality with your head in the stars. Your doubts shouldn't stop your aspirations. Yeah, it's a cold, cruel world out there. True. What are you going to do about it? Your pessimism should fuel your will and good intentions. Nothing contradictory in that. Why did this thought once again take hold of me? How does it apply to my current predicament? I'm in solitary confinement for an indefinite period. Pretty bleak. My Will will sustain me. It has to. An optimistic will.

Let's write about all the reasons you are completely incapable of sustaining any sort of prolonged fast. Or let's conscientiously object to all that needs objecting to. Rebel. Refuse. What else do I have? In for a penny, in for a pound. Either you care about something or you don't. I think I heard Kubrick say that. Exactly. Either you care, or you don't. I'm in no position to take some qualified, nuanced stance. How strongly do I feel about what I'm doing, the cause I align myself with? My feelings aside, how important is the cause? How many people have died to get the Movement to where it is today? How many people have starved? Is there anything to do but move forward?

"Die in a fight that shouldn't even be a fight."

Alice Paul. That's it for me, really. The World should be a paradise. Utopia. Everyone's needs taken care of. Period. It shouldn't be a fight. Die for that? How strongly do you feel about it? Do you care? Or not? Taking practical steps to make the World a better place. Radical steps.

Maybe a prolonged fast would, at the very least, initiate contact with whoever is holding me. Maybe there are others here. Maybe I could be placed in the general population. Write letters to my loved ones. Is this a letter? I have to try. I have been here long enough. Take it moment by moment. I won't eat my next meal. Keep alert. Stay vigilant. Listen to my body and try to figure out if they are force feeding me while I'm unconscious. Are they gassing me, figuratively and literally? I don't know that. There's a lot I don't know. Keep trying to find things out. About this place. About yourself. Keep going. Keep going by stopping. Refusing. This is what we are preaching every day. Refusal is the most powerful tool we have.

A rotting corpse on your doorstep. Not good. Deal with that.

I'm getting results when I search "hunger strike". What they are and aren't censoring is odd, really. I have to put aside the notion that I'm being gaslit. I found this from someone named Thomas Mahany.

"We are all born innocent, and it's only later that we develop these discriminations, jealousies, and alienations. But deep down, everyone still has that innocence in them. That's what the hunger strike is. It's the most non-violent, innocent form of protest."

That's it, isn't it? Innocence. Non-violence. What else can I do? There is something primal and elemental about it. What if I can't sustain the strike? That thought shouldn't stop me from starting.

Have I ever deprived myself, in any way, before this? Have I ever gone without food? Yes, I have. What happened to me? Do I want to go into it here? Not really. I had a bit of a psychotic break. Silly really. Not proud. My mind was in such a state that I didn't really feel any hunger. It was only for a few days. I can't remember. I don't want to remember. With the love and support of my family and friends, I came out of it, and I have been healthy for a while now, with no fear of it happening again. Why am I not more afraid now?

I'm reading that after a few days, the body switches from the carbs and glucose it uses to the fats you have stored. You actually get a bump in energy and your hunger dissipates. After that, it feeds on your muscle tissue and it gets bad...hallucinations, severe fatigue and loss of strength, then death. Bobby Sands. Irish revolutionary. 66 day strike. Then a coma. Then death. 66 days?

They won't let me die. This will open contact, and that's a place to start. What do I want? Why do I want it? I want the Earth to be a safe and thriving community, a place where all its citizens are fulfilled in every way. It seems obvious, and completely attainable. Why we are not there yet is absurd to me. That's what I want. That's what I'm fighting for. I fight for it because I can. I must. I have an obligation to better the world. My conscience, my spirit, everything I am, tells me this is it. This is what to do. Everything else is not doing it.

I'm gonna leave my next meal in the bin and see what happens. Just that. One meal. Refused.

Hunger strike. Great. No one saw that coming. Of course we didn't. Our arrogance and self-assuredness know no bounds. Got it all figured out. Well well-thought-out plan. Not one high-functioning soul even breathed a word about this possibility; a complicated, messy wrench in the gears at the very least. At worst...a dead martyr? Great.

And another thing. Should we contact our guests' loved ones? There's so much going on in the world at the moment, it seems that his absence has gotten lost in the shuffle. His friends are worried, but figure he's a prisoner of war, a political prisoner, and that whoever took him will contact them. Will we? Have we even touched on that? At all? No. Put this on the list of problems to solve.

"We are not ready. You are not ready. He can live off his stored fat for a few days. He'll blink. He'll eat. Next."

Really? Our sense of humor and the way we dance around things in our conversations can be infuriating. It speaks to our love of improvisation, imagination, and play. Now you are playing with the soul of a stranger, an exotic bird you are keeping in a cage, blinded and ignorant. My protestations are not being given their proper weight. In a world where there is never any urgency when it comes along, we are clueless. Truly ill-equipped. Our candidate was chosen because he didn't seem hardened or beaten down by his environment. Not a soldier. Not a fighter. We felt that was good for our purposes. Now he has refused. In a way that's innocent and nonviolent, yet absolute and strong. A pawn has our king in check. Maybe he isn't the man we were looking for. Maybe the bell needs to be unrung. What about all the other things that need to happen?

I just reread a bit of this. I used the word "infuriating." In my public life, I would never even hint at being infuriated, even with a gesture. Being upset about anything is considered unattractive and impolite. Things I write here... I would never...

Our meetings, our chats, the way we go about solving problems...it's flawed. It's slow-moving. Confusing. Inefficient.

They never happen at a set time, and they are never with the same people. As a group, we are fiercely opposed to any kind of hierarchy, pecking order, or power structure. Our power lies in our ability to cooperate and trust each other. Everyone has a say. Everyone gets a fair shake. Decisions are made and actions are taken with this in mind at all times. A dozen people, more or less, are present when something a bit more official occurs. It happens spontaneously. We all understand this through a series of social cues. Very subtle. A glance. A grin. Let's begin.

Typically, not much is said. There are long gaps of silence between loose ideas being exchanged. It's all very open and calm. Calm is the order of the day. On the surface. Beneath that, each individual has an intensity, a sharpness, a finely tuned wit that plays off the moment and the present actively, lucidly, and clearly.

Entropy. Things tend to fall apart. Decay. Become disorganized. What energies do we employ to keep that from happening? Binding agents. Keeping things from changing. The Sun. An influx of energy can decrease entropy in closed systems.

Processes that decrease entropy.

Freezing and condensation (staying calm...chilling)

Reactions that combine two molecules into one (addition) (fusion, coming together)

Reactions that reduce the number of gas molecules (less talk)

Reactions that make a molecule more rigid (going from long chains to inflexible rings) (forming rings from chains)

We are acutely aware of these things at all times, so a kind of telepathy occurs as a result of experience and repetition. Outside? Calm. Reserved. Slow. Inside? Active. Bubbling. Intense.

Funny that I am trying to explain myself and define us here on this page, as if someone outside our group will read this years from now in search of some understanding. Is that what I should do? Explain myself? Who is this for? This is a private journal. This is for fun. Write anything you would like at any time.

Much of our time is taken up with discussions of events happening outside our sphere of influence. We can't keep up with the societal changes taking place. The speed at which things are crumbling and entropy is occurring is dizzying. We don't know how to keep up with it intellectually. Our guest is lost in the shuffle. The changing riptides. Here, there, and everywhere.

"He's by himself. He's fasting. It's a cleansing. We need his mind and spirit to be in a place where he can be more receptive. A place where a connection and healthy relationship can freely occur."

Ok, I guess. As enlightened as our guest seems to be, there is a very real, large gap between the ways that we exist and operate. Maybe it's not bad. Where we are at the moment. For now, I can wait. Listen.

I'm glad to be hearing talk about intervening on the world stage. We had every intention of developing our technology and governance for much longer, generations even, before we presented ourselves.

We have a gift. How do you give it? How do you receive it? That's complicated for a group that is fond of simplicity, to a fault. We're at a loss, frankly.

I offered up the idea that a sea change is happening very quickly the world over. Very large revolts. Multitudes are gathering in the public square, unafraid. A mass rejection of the status quo. And we should take a cue from that. If it wasn't happening at light speed, it wouldn't be happening at all. That seemed to resonate a bit.

Our meetings end much the way they start. Spontaneously. Without formality. There is no particular duration. Nothing scheduled. No timepiece. No minutes. No record. Is action taken based on any conclusions that might have surfaced? Sometimes. I am still the one who will be the first contact. I am preparing for that. We are preparing to make ourselves known. To offer a gift.

Three

I am unclear about the passage of time here. I don't have a timepiece of any kind. I always thought that was a bit of a construct. Mechanical time. The ticking of a clock. A futile attempt to inject a bit of order into a chaotic universe. That's not how time passes for us. That's not how time works. It's more fluid than that. In the macro and the micro.

The lighting in this room dims and brightens randomly. My solitude and the possibility that I'm being drugged or gassed makes me unclear about the passage of time. Without a chronometer, I don't really trust my own gauge of this. When I think about it or try to pin it down, it just frustrates me. The sum of the particulars of my incarceration here has put me in a state of confusion and disorientation. I started these entries well after I got here, and I make them sporadically. How long have I been here? If I had to guess, a week or two. I have no idea.

The other entries I have made here have been deleted. I think this is in response to my passing on the last meal. I guess they don't want me rereading what I wrote about my decision to refuse food. Is that it? Deleted, erased, obliterated completely? Or have they kept the entries? I hold on to the hope that one of my hacker friends has figured out a way to capture these words and is distributing them widely. Maybe my location has been determined and a large force is mounting a rescue mission. Is it helpful to think of such things? What is in front of me?

I got a response from my abductors. Hopefully, they are struggling with how to deal with my hunger strike. Is that what it is? One meal. I'm feeling ok at the moment and fully prepared to refuse my next meal as well.

"There's a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in."

Not sure where I heard that. No. I heard it on a TV crime drama.

Search.

Leonard Cohen.

Is there a crack here? Is my hunger strike causing a fissure? Will it grow to where a bit of light seeps in? Contact with them? With fellow prisoners? Is there a general population here? Just shooting the breeze about nothing with anyone else would be so comforting right now. There is a crack in everything. There is a crack in my soul right now and the blinding light of an interrogator is making it hard to concentrate. What should I be concentrating on? Too much of that is a bad thing. How do I relax into this situation? How do I take pressure off myself and move forward from moment to moment? I could count the moments and put tick marks on the wall, hoping to get a better handle on the passage of time, but the utensils I use to eat, and the material this room is made of, make it impossible for me to put a scratch in anything here. I tried. No luck.

Another meal is here for me. An omelet. Big one. 5 or 6 eggs? Potatoes. Toast. Coffee. Juice. Smells delicious.

How did they figure out what I like to eat? They have been spot on meal after meal. Easy enough, I guess. They are giving me access to the files on my computers and cloud accounts here. They took me from my home. I have nothing. They have everything. I have this screen, this etch-a-sketch they can shake anytime. What kind of a liability have I

become to my family and my organization? What should I write and not write here? Does it matter? How can I strengthen my frame of mind and move forward from here?

If I can secure a negotiation with my captors, what would that look like?

If I pretend for a moment this is an important historical document, some more background about the current struggle I am now engaged in would be good. It couldn't be simpler. Boss. Worker. It couldn't be more complicated. The numerous factions, agendas, secrets, lies, corruptions, and conflicts; they make a web that is in equal measure strong and weak. I imagine each thread so thin, each knot so tight.

Is irony the word here? I am new to the struggle, naïve, and ill-equipped to do anything substantial. But my standing, my fame, my family connections, my figurehead status, give me power to exact meaningful, lasting change.

I would be reasonable in any type of negotiation, large or small. Let's work this out. Let's build trust. One conversation at a time. Let's sit down for a meal together and find out what we have in common. Do we hate each other? We don't even know each other.

What do you want? The status quo?

How does this room stay clean? The technology involved with this space is beyond my understanding. What I wouldn't give for a cockroach crawling across a dirt floor right now. The antiseptic nature of this, as comfortable as it is, is wearing on me. If I defecated somewhere other than the toilet, I am sure I would wake up to the feces, and its odor, being removed as if it never happened. I keep trying to come up with ways to unsteady the mind numbing equilibrium that exists here, to no effect. The only thing that has caused any kind of response or change has been skipping one meal. And the only thing that happened was this writing disappearing. Maybe the two things are completely unrelated. I must continue to fast. Some water and a bit of salt, if I can figure that out. I read that a bit of salt can help. Now there will be no salt to be had.

Are you gonna let me starve to death? You and I know that is a really bad idea. Force feeding. Another terrible idea and what you are gonna have to do, I'm afraid.

You know exactly what I'm feeling right now. The hunger pangs anyone gets after a short period of fasting. The smell of the food here is inviting, but I remain committed.

Committed to improving the working conditions of every laborer.

Committed to a more just distribution of wealth and resources.

Committed to a safer and cleaner environment in which to live.

Committed to the notion of a world without want of any kind.

Committed to the idea of unconditional trust.

Committed to the right of free self expression in all its forms.

Committed to you, my friend.

I am strong for the moment, and I feel I can continue this fast. I need to stay occupied with good thoughts, and positive energy. Stretch the body. A bit of exercise. I need to be ready for when I meet my abductors, which won't be long, I hope. Long. Again, I have no idea about Time here. Count sheep. Try to sleep. Take my mind to a warm, comfortable place. Think about what I should write here. Move forward as if it's more than just a finger in the sand. How can I help? If these words are getting out, I need to be more inspiring. I need to be strong. I need to need very little. I need to distract myself, escape from here in my mind. Maybe my next entry should be just that. Some unrelated memory or anecdote. A poem. A lyric. A song. Maybe I'll write a letter to my loved ones as if I'm on vacation. Maybe I should begin to codify and flesh out what I truly believe. The roots of my faith. Maybe I should continue to negotiate with my captors, one sided as it is.

I just looked at my files and found this.

"Everything new was begun in a dream."

I think I saw that in a book by Sanora Babb. I love that. It's so true, no matter how you apply it. Maybe an investigation of my current dreams. My actual REM dreams. My daydreams. My aspirations. Without those things, nothing begins. I mean, the Big Bang was dreamt first. Of course it was. Creation, large and small, has its origins in thought. Everything new was begun in a dream.

Everybody makes fun of Don Quixote. I had an immediate connection to him, and found nothing funny about it. It's all a dream. It should be a dream. An easy dream. I see no reason for anything else. There would be fewer natural disasters, diseases, and things out of our control if we all gave each other space to live our dreams. I believe that. And our response to these things could be better. Our collective response to Death and suffering. When I say, "perfect pleasure", that anything less than that is ridiculous, what do I mean? That sadness and tragedy are absent? No. Those things would be in a completely different space. Head space. Body space. Our Community would deal with these things in a way that would be more in line with our true nature. Which is innocent. And kind. Not concerned with power and control. Yes, Don Quixote. Let's dream of that. Let's dream of a world of dreamers. I'm rambling naively about things I know nothing about. I'm too young to know the inner machinations of the universe and the reasons for its complexities. How Chaos brings order to things. How a young, privileged man can end up in a hole for the wrong reasons, or the right reasons, and be on the cusp of great change, worldwide. I know why I'm here, yet I don't. Don't you have bigger fish to fry? Am I that influential? The fact that I'm still alive tells me a lot about the power I hold over this situation. So let me starve. How does that sound?

“Don’t you want to be reading what he’s writing? To better prepare?”

Yes, I do. But it still feels like a violation. An invasion. We stole the gentleman and threw him in a hole, and here I am worried about his privacy. Privacy. Solitude. I believe I am feeling an emotion I have never felt before. Envy. It’s absent here. What’s there to be envious of? I have everything I could possibly need, mind, body, and spirit, and so does everyone else. Envy, jealousy, or coveting of any kind just wouldn’t make sense here. I’m not even sure if that’s what I’m feeling, as it doesn’t exist here and has never existed. Our guest has an apartment. A room to call his own. He lives alone and can isolate himself anytime he wishes, and now, here, he has that. Quiet. Complete solitude. What would that be like? I sleep in a common room with many other people very close to me. I eat in a cafeteria. I can walk in a courtyard by myself for a bit, but invariably I am approached by someone with some problem or another. That’s my role. To interact with everyone. I enjoy that. I’m a shoulder to cry on, a person to confide in. But that leaves no room for solitude. I think I would like that. I think it would nourish me. I have to deal with something right now, actually. More later.

“Everything new was begun in a dream.”

That’s lovely. It’s in his journal. Quoted from someone named Sanora Babb. I really like how he sprinkles in quotes he’s collected and reflects on them.

Begun in a dream. It really does apply to most anything. That’s certainly true for us. Somebody dreamt this up. A long time ago. That’s the story, as far as it goes. We don’t dwell on the past. In the short or long term. Our myths are rarely mentioned. I wrote this down before, I think, but again, everything archival happens automatically. I’m guessing someone monitors and maintains all that, at least superficially, but I don’t know that. Is there some Icelandic Saga in ink on parchment in a big wooden box buried in a cave somewhere? Detailing our trip, our evolution, and the beginnings of this project? Maybe. Probably not. We always begin again, from the most fleeting thoughts to the most foundational concepts. It is a dream. The way dreams are ephemeral, poetic, and beautiful. We emphasize all that here. How we got here, how we learn from the past, how we contemplate the future...that’s all submerged, in the background, trusted like one trusts that they will take their next breath.

Trust. Building it. Between us and our guest. That will be my job. And it will be at the beginning, a clean slate...worse than that. He’s refusing to eat, confused, confined, and frightened in the dark.

“Oh, that. Your incarceration. Your isolation. Yeah, well, don’t worry about all that. We really want to be friends.”

I need some good ideas about this. Our improvisations. The teasing, playful dance we do to confuse each other, our instincts and intuitions, they don’t help here. An outsider entering a closed system. Diametrically opposed mindsets. A stranger in a strange land. How do we help him? How to connect? Reading his musings, I do think we have as good a

candidate as we could hope for. His sensibilities, ethics, and ideas are aligned with ours in many ways. I think he will be intrigued by our culture. I think it will have some appeal. It's more a matter of coming up with a shared language and a new vocabulary.

Something new begun in a dream.

Four

The fact that my entries are being deleted a short time after I write them, does that matter? The implications and/or consequences of what I write here, does that matter? It passes the time. It helps me think. I hold on to hope that someone, friend or foe, is reading this. Would it be better to not do this? I am scared, disoriented, hungry, tired, and going a bit mad from the solitude and monotony. But I'm not crazy yet. Whether I do or not, I still feel like I have my wits about me. I am surprised I'm not more depressed, fatigued, or terrified. The effects of the prolonged fast are not what I expected. The last thing on my mind, really. The thing I do most is stab in the dark for coping mechanisms against the solitude and quiet. So quiet. What I wouldn't give for a fly landing on my nose right now. A rat scurrying across the floor. I imagine some other prisoner somewhere, in wretched conditions, dreaming of a warm bed, an easy chair, and piping hot five course meals every few hours. I am the only animate thing here. An ant. A worm. I would love to get close to their activity. I would stare into puddles for hours as a child, pretending to be a biologist, watching small organisms in the water, observing their behavior, taking notes, making discoveries.

The smell is getting to me. An antiseptic, sweet, clean smell one might find in a hospital, and it never changes. I imagine a musty, dirty, stinking cell with a mud floor and sweating walls. Bugs and small rodents cohabitating with me. This sounds good to me right now. I close my eyes and try to remember smells. And views. And faces. I guess it's a sensory deprivation that's happening to me, as well as the effects of the fasting. The only thing that has changed since my refusal to eat is my writing being deleted. Everything else is the same.

There is the jet sound. The rocket launch sound. I heard it again today. I think it's happening fairly close. It's powerful. If I really stay calm and aware when it happens, there is a slight vibration. Am I underground? Am I part of or near an industrial-military complex? Are there other prisoners here? I'd like to be amongst the general population. What a contrast this is to the social animal I was before. The noisy, hectic world I live in. Crowded. Busy. Never a quiet moment alone. That's all I have now and I don't know if I can remain here very much longer without going crazy or unconscious or worse.

A rocket is a big jet engine. I think what I'm hearing are rockets, reaching great altitudes. That's the way the sound dissipates. Not like a jet airplane overhead. More like a launch. The sound is larger and thicker than a commercial aircraft. What does that tell me? Are they ICBMs being launched in some kind of military conflict? Was I abducted by my side for my protection? Sides. That's a tough one I'm slowly learning. Double agents. Triple agents. Disinformation. Questionable loyalties to numerous factions, all with resources, grudges, and agendas. The people I answer to, do I trust them? Do they have rockets? Let's say it's rockets with warheads attached for a moment. Nuclear warheads? Am I being kept safe? Is my abduction and current welfare a factor in the overall political and military landscape, messy as it is? What would a good soldier do in my situation? It's laughable how ignorant I am of all that. I'm not a soldier. I wouldn't be here if my activities weren't having an impact, would I? Am I some ill-equipped Joan of Arc, at the vanguard of a global conflict? Can't be. I'm just somebody that was easy to get off the streets. Holding me here is nothing. Less than nothing. If I starve to death, so what?

The fluctuating dynamics of what was happening when I got here make it impossible to even speculate. What else can I do but sit here and ponder my next move?

A letter to my captors.

To whom it may concern,

I will continue to fast until I am placed into the general population. At that time I will take my meals and do what is required. I will cooperate in every way. I demand to be presented to the leadership and to begin a negotiation regarding our release, as well as the current conditions and desires of our fellow laborers world wide. Only when we begin to debate our differences, our causes, our missions, our visions of the future, will we be able to quell our hostilities.

We have made clear that we want a fair shake, a seat at the table, a living wage, a safe and healthy environment in which to do the good work of society at large.

You don't want a rotting corpse on your doorstep. And if this continues, that's what you will have.

Let's end this. Thank you.

Currently in a prolonged cease fire. I've never seen one bullet fly. One bomb. My activities have been non-violent. Is that what is happening now? Is that what I hear? Rockets? The start of a war? Things were certainly coming to a head. I'm here now because of something. Taking me out of play makes sense.

I'm losing my train of thought. The fast is having an effect on me. I'm tired. I have a dull ache throughout my body. Hunger pains. But it's ok. It's not as bad as I predicted. For now. I can keep this up. I will continue this. It has to work. They are going to want to talk to me soon. I'm not being drugged. I don't think I am. Why does the lack of response feel like I'm being gaslit, manipulated? The silence, literally and figuratively, is deafening.

I sing, talk to myself, make rhythms with my hands and body, just to fight against this quiet. I run in place. I breathe noisily and heavily. My attempts at meditation are brief and unsuccessful. I'm a nervous, fragile soul, and that is becoming more apparent here. But I am fasting. I have my wits. I'm surprised at my resilience thus far. I have found some courage and stoic repose somehow. I've always believed I've been watched over and guarded, and I feel that even now. Even here. It's not my strength. It's our strength. How did Alexander Chee put it? The "spirit-chain world-mind oversoul". That. The collective unconscious. Is that Jung? I have always felt connected to that. It comforts me. It is staving off the darkness now. It is keeping me buoyant and engaged and strong and connected and unafraid. Any fear I feel only comes from myself. If I focus on all that surrounds me that is not me, but is us, the Big US, the Us of ten thousand generations, only then will I make it through this.

I'm imagining myself in my easy chair at home, sipping a beer, relaxing after a productive day. We have made some small concessions for a small Union of laborers and have been rewarded with a return home and a few days off. I have nothing on my schedule. I can rest easy and write a poem or lyric, maybe. Read a novel. What would I do right now if I were there? Sip my beer. Recline. Think about as little as possible. That sounds nice. Let me go to that place now.

The jet sounds again. This time it sounded like two at once. It's muffled. Like I am underground. The technology of this room feels futuristic and not like anything I have seen before. I'm on Mars. That's it. I've been transported to the future and I am on Mars, in a bunker, at a base launching rockets at space aliens. Might as well be Mars. Where I am now. Where am I? I am near, or in, a rocket launching facility, probably underground. I am in solitary confinement in a prison. There has to be someone nearby. I'd like their company. I'd like to talk to them. Chat. About nothing. And everything. Then I'd like to rest. Is it healthy for me to be laying down so much? Fight through the fatigue. NO. Recognize it. Placate it. This means you are alive. Your body will use your fat stores soon, and you will get a burst of energy. For now, rest. It's ok. Rest.

They are messing with me. The room becomes very bright when I am at my most tired. My laptop is becoming more quirky in its operation. I can search for certain terms that you would think would be off limits. I can't search for the most benign terms. When I search for one phrase, it bumps me to something completely unrelated. This is progress. Them messing with me is a sign that someone is monitoring me and that they, eventually, will need to confront me. Free me. Talk with me.

Will someone please speak with me? The fasting and the solitude is getting harder and harder to take.

The "spirit-chain world-mind oversoul". Tap into that. Meditate. Find that.

I just woke from a nap now. I feel like I can do this for a while longer. I need to keep in mind that my faculties will keep fading. My mind will falter. Things are gonna get worse. But that's ok. What should I do in this space? Keep pleading with my captors? Write some memories? I need to stop for a bit and pick this up later. Hopefully, I won't have to. Hopefully, I'll meet my captors soon.

Interview part one

“Hello, Maggie. Thanks for seeing me today. Do you mind if I record our conversation?”

“No, not at all. So you will play it back several times, review it, analyze it, try to make some sense of it, and mold it into some kind of narrative?”

“Yes.”

“First thing, don’t address me as Maggie. No need. It makes me very uncomfortable. You’re here. I’m here. Let’s not do that.”

“Ok. Why does that make you uncomfortable?”

“Nothing is to be clung to as I, me, or mine.”

“Buddha?”

“That’s right.”

“Using names feels clingy?”

“Yes, it does. Discussing it all is making me more uncomfortable. I don’t feel that it’s necessary. I’m not used to it. I’ve never done it, formally or informally. Is this what we will be talking about? The particulars of our social mores? Our etiquette? How we address each other? I’m not sure I’m up for that. I don’t think we are starting off very well.”

“No. We don’t have to talk about that. It just strikes me as odd, not using names, and I was just curious about it. Names are important. Family names. Having a good name. It solves a lot of basic communication problems. Naming something. Anything. Doesn’t it?”

“You are ok with not using my name?”

“Yes.”

“Ok. Can we leave it at that? Now, and for the rest of our interview? Can you leave my name out of whatever form and dissemination this might take?”

“Yes, I can. Never mention it again.”

“Thank you. Why are you doing this?”

“Just a hobby. It would be a stretch to call me a journalist or historian. It was a seminal time, those few weeks when you and yours introduced yourselves. Twenty years ago now? I can find very little information about it anywhere. Your proclivities towards emphasizing the present, not dwelling on or even acknowledging the past, that’s how it is everywhere now. Of all the things that have stuck, excluding your technology, I would say it’s right up there as being the thing that’s most prevalent and the most practiced now. My interest doesn’t run deep. I’m just curious about what it was like. You were at the center of it. What happens to this interview after it’s done? Very little, probably. I’m not expecting much interest in it.”

“Twenty years ago?”

“Yes. To the day, actually, the day you presented yourselves and your ideas at the U.N.”

“How about that? You count the years, do you? You keep track? Not a historian, ok. But you have books? Historical books? As a hobby, you attempt to gather information about the past?”

“Yes, just a hobby. Quite challenging, in fact. Facts. They are hard to come by and most of the time I feel like a lone wolf.”

“Interesting.”

“I think so. Do you have any other questions for me?”

“Books with the information you seek. Where do you find them? How many do you have?”

“I have a small collection. Thirty to forty volumes. How did they come into my possession? Each one has its own magical story attached to it.”

“Magical?”

“Yes, magical. It feels to me like some outside force brought them to me through a series of random events I don’t understand. And these books have very little information regarding why I’m here today. That time. When you magically appeared. I’m piecing things together. I’m hoping you can help me.”

“I’m sure that’s true. An outside force. I’m not sure I can help you. I will try. You’re telling a person who thinks very little about all things Past, short or long term, that it was twenty years ago.”

“I understand. You are very kind for doing this.”

“Not at all.”

“Who were you, you plural, at that time? And who were you in the years, decades, and eras leading up to those events?”

“A group of like-minded souls, loosely connected and far-flung. That’s the short answer. My understanding is that we go way back. I wasn’t a historian, and I’m not one now. You have some machine that just works. You have some way of interacting that just works. That’s how it always was for me, even from a very young age. No one talked about it. I wasn’t interested in it, our origins. We played in the sunshine from day to day. We still do.”

“The world was spinning wildly out of control. Is that what prompted your actions?”

“Yes.”

“You were completely unknown to anyone. That must have taken a great effort on your part. Why weren’t you more transparent earlier?”

“Yes, it did. There’s probably a perplexing contradiction that you see between our secrecy and our transparency, to use your word, that would be hard to explain. One thing I can say is that as much as the world was at a tipping point, we were, too, in terms of our technology and our ability to share it. Frankly, we weren’t ready, not even close. Coming out wasn’t discussed, as it seemed to be down the road a bit, generationally down the road. But when looking at the fissures and conflicts taking place and the pain it was causing, we began to think about how we could share our gift, as an act of triage, if nothing else.”

“I get that. You saw a tsunami. You wanted to offer some sandbags.”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“I want to tread lightly here. Guest? Detainee? Can we refer to him as that?”

“Guest is fine.”

“It’s twenty years on now. One thing that’s increasingly absent from our world is extremism. You are nothing if not methodical, patient, calm, and unemotional. Nothing is extreme. Not a gesture. Not an idea. Not a word or action. It has done us all a lot of good. Taking someone from their home. Placing them in solitary confinement for quite a while. Would that be an accurate way to put it? That seems pretty extreme. The most extreme decision out of a large number of choices that could have been made.”

“Yes, that’s accurate. I think if you thought about it again as deeply as we did, you would most likely conclude that taking him, kidnapping him, was the only decision to be made.”

“Really?”

“Yes. Not to confuse you, but I can also say that it was a bad decision. We went about it awkwardly. Our decision-making process was flawed. Our first few days with our guest were a fumble.”

“The only decision, yet poorly executed?”

“That’s simplistic. But I’m fond of simplicity, inaccurate or not. Peeling away the intricacies, it was the only decision to be made, and it was poorly executed. Yes.”

“Fame. Notoriety. Being well known. A very different thing now than it was then. But your guest at the time was famous, very famous. The reason you chose him?”

“Yes, along with the fact that he seemed to be the kind of person that would be receptive to our ideas.”

“He would be listened to. Did that seem to be a risk as well? What if he didn’t like your ideas?”

“Risk? No. We had faith. Trusted what we were doing was right. And that he would get that.”

“Was there a long list? A short list? Were other people considered? What was that process like?”

“I wasn’t privy to much of that. I became much more involved after he was chosen.”

“Involved. Your word. Can you describe your involvement? From the beginning?”

“It was decided that I would be the first contact with our guest.”

“How did you come to that decision?”

“Like every other one. Slowly. Clumsily. Spontaneously. Elegantly.”

“Nonhierarchical. That’s emerging more and more around the world now. It was like that, then? Meetings. Agendas. Decisions. How do they play out?”

“We live with the frustrations that come from that. Embrace it. Play with it. Better than the alternative. Even the most critical decisions are handled with a lightness that would be hard to explain or even justify. Even back then, this was true. The fact that the sky was falling and that we decided to take drastic action; it caused friction. We were inexperienced with these kinds of circumstances and didn’t care. Bumbling, mumbling, tumbling forward with a smile on our lips, a song in our hearts, and a skull in our pocket.”

“Hah! That’s one thing I have looked at. That’s from your guest. Is that right?”

“Hah! Yes, that’s right. Love that. Love him.”

“What happened when he started fasting? That part of his notes is fascinating. He had an inner strength that’s admirable.”

“We bumbled and mumbled and fumbled some more, till we practically killed him. Someone said it was acting as a cleansing, a positive thing, and we went with that.”

“Strip him of himself to better approach him and win his trust.”

“A brainwashed prisoner beaten down and indoctrinated into a totalitarian, fascist cult.”

“There are folks who look at all this, those events, and what has happened since in that light. How do I feel about that?”

“All ideas float free. We had a gift. Technology. That technology yielding vast resources. We felt strongly that any gifting in that regard needed to be married with a form of governance, or lack thereof, for it to work and sustain itself. Cult. Fascist. Authoritarian. I find it hard to call it those things when everyone is cared for and completely free to live and contribute in any way they see fit. Even now, everything we do is completely voluntary and cooperative. There are plenty of people who have rejected our ideas and have nothing to do with us. Is that right?”

“That’s right.”

“There you go.”

Five

I feel surprisingly well at the moment. I'm not hungry and I feel a boost of energy and mental acuity. I have fallen into a routine that is giving me a feeling of stability. Exercises. Meditation. This writing. I have let go of my concerns about what my captors know and don't know about my present state, my associates and their activities, and my complete loss of privacy. I don't know what is in store for me. I am trying to remain in the present tense as best I can. I am ok for the moment, and that is enough.

The meals keep getting changed out and they remain as sumptuous as ever, and my resolve against taking in nourishment is stable and, in my mind, sustainable for now.

I want to document the details of my life the days before my abduction, and the day of my abduction, hoping to remember something that could assist me now.

"As soon as you have it all figured out, that's when everything changes." A friend said that to me a while ago, and it has stuck with me. Whenever I get over confident, clever, arrogant, whenever a bit of hubris comes on, that's when I get rocked by something unexpected. Every time.

Things were going well. My organization was making great strides, and a tipping point seemed imminent. Our marches and protests were growing in number. The communications between our allies and opponents were expanding. Real change was taking place across the board. I had come on board full time about a year or so ago as an organizer, and I had fallen into a routine of various meetings, teleconferences, demonstrations, speeches. My enthusiasm and confidence was peaking. "There's a crack in everything. That's where the light comes in." Cracks everywhere. Light gushing in. Positive light. The hearts and minds of everyone I was interacting with were changing for the good. Solidarity. A willingness to come together from every side coming into view.

A cosmopolitan life, I would call it. A fairly luxurious condo twenty floors up with a view of a vibrant, bustling metropolis. Typically secure with a doorman, security cameras, all the things that make one feel at home and at peace. Living alone, I was home about fifteen days a month, traveling widely otherwise. I was rather busy and involved the week before it happened, but not exhausted. Thriving. Happy. Confident. Probably too much so.

The day of my abduction was like any other. In the morning, I met with my closest associates for breakfast at our regular spot, a greasy spoon diner that we all loved. The combination of good food, great service, and atmosphere served our purposes well. We could reserve a back room, not a room, a back section of the place that gave us some space to talk and ideate freely. I had a vegetable omelet with home fries, toast and coffee. Our meal lasted about an hour and a half, and our discussions were cordial and productive. We got to all our talking points, which included an upcoming march, a conference with other active groups, and talks with various employers about a myriad of issues.

I left the meeting alone and stopped by our offices a few blocks away. I had a few quick chats with the usual suspects and picked up a few things for my first appointment of the day. I was meeting three of our lawyers at the offices of a corporation that we were negotiating with. These meetings would typically bog down after an hour or so, but that day I was optimistic about some progress, and progress came in the way of a few important concessions on either side. The meeting went as expected and there was nothing suspicious about it. One of the larger employers we have dealt with so

far. International. Seemingly unlimited resources, material and intellectual. Is this who took me? Can't rule them out as I write this, but just one suspect among many that currently swirl through my mind.

I got lunch in the park, at a hot dog stand. Not the regular guy. I guess that's a red flag now, but it wasn't then. He recognized me and gave me a few encouraging words and spoke of a family member currently on strike. The chat was fairly innocuous, but even at the time I was a bit put off by his sudden familiarity and he seemed to pry a bit, so I cut him off and took my seat on my usual bench and ate. I really should try to remember this man and the conversation we had. It seems important, but for now, moving on with my report.

I had two interviews that afternoon. The first was at a large news outlet uptown, so I took the subway and walked the few blocks to their offices. I met with a reporter that I had a good, long standing relationship with. She would always throw me softball questions. More like a publicist. That's one thing that had been going particularly well recently. Getting the word out. Awareness. This news group and this reporter were a big part of that. I told her so that day pointedly, and she received my gratitude with her typical nonchalance. I wasn't sure if she was working on a piece about us currently, under a deadline, or had any heightened interest in us. We would meet regularly, regardless. We had built a trust. Friends, really, although not close. Trust. Now that I'm here, I am reassessing what or who I can trust. A good informal interview, nothing out of the ordinary.

My second interview that afternoon was downtown, in the arts district, at a smaller independent activist news organization that had just formed. Our detractors would call them propagandists, which was fair really, but that was fine with me. We were riding a wave. Momentum was everything, and we had it. More softball questions. More flattery. More offers of help. I was on a roll. These folks seemed genuinely inspired and energized. We would be the feature piece of their next posting, and their readership was growing to significant levels.

My apartment is in midtown, so I took a taxi home. It was around five. Much like the hot dog guy, the cabbie was chatty, oddly prying once again. Now that I write this, I believe these two gentlemen were part of a surveillance. Maybe not. Do I remember their faces? Anything else about them? No.

At this point, there was nothing about my day that felt threatening or unsafe. My fame had made me used to the awkward interactions that would sometimes take place. I had built up a certain protection from this, a way of moving through life that worked for me.

I decided to have dinner alone in my condo that night, and I stopped at the sushi place next to my building. I sat at the bar, ordered a hot sake, and waited for my take out order. Wait. Another conversation with a stranger. Woman. Older. Kind of flaky, but attractive. Again, I wouldn't be able to pick her out of a lineup now. A big fan, she said. Almost over the top, with praise and encouragement. When I tried to find out a little more about her, she demurred and changed the subject. When I put the three interactions together, the hot dog guy, the cabbie, the woman at the sushi bar, the hairs on my neck stand up. I wasn't a spy. I was a neophyte organizer. I was new at this, and everything I was doing at the time was completely above board, although I was rattling some pretty big cages. I believe now these three folks were monitoring me, following me, keeping track of my movements in real time.

I left the restaurant, said hello to the doorman, and took the elevator to my floor, and went directly to my apartment.

I had my dinner in my easy chair, which faces the large window that gives me a spectacular view of the city. Nourishing, this spot. This exact spot in the condo. My relaxation peaks here. Sometimes I watch TV while eating, but not

that night. I was enjoying the view and my food as I had many times before. I had some music on, at a low volume.. After finishing my meal, I left the containers on a side table, dimmed the lamp next to me, and reclined. I was good at taking a few moments for myself. From experience, I knew it would help me the next day. I could take naps when I wanted. I could get to a nice blank space in my mind on demand. I cherish that. I think it is helping me now, here in this cell. Without that, I think I would be a mess of emotion and fear.

I didn't hear the door open. One moment I was in the place I just described and the next moment there was a hood over my head and what I think was duct tape around my arms and legs, securing me tightly to the chair. That only lasted a minute. Or two. Could I feel six hands on me? I felt there were three people in the room with me. Their breath. Their movements. I was up out of the chair quickly, hands behind my back. I could breathe through the hood, but I was in total blackness and disoriented, and terrified. I urinated. My feet were barely on the ground. They took me out of the room and down the flights of stairs leading to the parking garage.

I said nothing. They said nothing. Next, I was on the floor in the back of a vehicle. An SUV? A minivan? The drive to where I am now took over two hours. I'm not sure. Three hours? During the trip, I did not hear any unusual sounds outside or inside the vehicle.

I can't remember what happened between getting out of the vehicle and getting here to this room. Did I go up or down in an elevator? I have since surmised that I am underground and inside a large military complex, but that is just a guess. Could be. Or not.

From the moment the hood went on to when the hood came off and I found myself here, alone, my fear has subsided. Terrified at first, but, through no fault of my own, through some reservoir of courage I didn't know I had, I have slowly relaxed into what is happening to me. I am still unsure if they drugged me, or if I am being drugged now. Nothing in my memory or the present points to this. That's it. If I scroll up and try to review this statement, it will probably disappear. I might try to do that later.

Just as an exercise, I'm going to write down what happened today. I was awoken by someone a few hours after deciding to sleep. This happens a lot. From what I understand, there's a normal routine that is common across many cultures. The day is broken into three big chunks. Sleep for a third of the day. Engage in some form of labor for a third, sometimes more. Then a third is left over for recreation, eating, relaxing, etc.

Not here. Not even close. We don't have set routines like that. You might sleep a bit, sundown or not. You might contribute for a while and engage in some common task or activity that benefits the facility. How long you do that is your choice. Eat. Games. Play. Contemplation. Most of us do these things on and off for shorter periods. Time. Way too complicated to go into our relationship, or non-relationship, with time right now. I want to write about what happened today. Maybe I'll write a short essay about time later. Make a note of that.

Everyone is encouraged and feels comfortable coming to me for whatever issue they might be having, so most of the time, all of the time, I am awoken by someone. Today was no different. There was some problem with the sleeping arrangements at another dormitory. That's what we call them when we need to, dorms. As I sat up and stretched, a few people were asking me if I could visit, listen, and possibly help resolve the issue. I do this all the time. That's why I'm writing about it. Describing typical activities on a typical day. Here. As an exercise.

If there is nothing too pressing, I usually get something to eat in the cafeteria shortly after I get up, but today I decided to head right over and see what the sleeping arrangement problem was.

I'm a good listener. As we walked to another dorm, it was explained to me that someone was snoring? Talking? Making noises? In their sleep to the point of distraction, and that it was keeping others awake. Could they be moved? Put their bunk in the hall? In the closet? Some kind of nose clip or muzzle? We laughed about this.

When I arrived, there were several of us in the common area chatting, waiting for me. Each dorm sleeps about a hundred and has a large common area that centrally connects to sleeping spaces, which are large rooms accommodating twenty or so beds. That's one thing we get right, and I am grateful for this. The design of the place. The architecture. All the things we use in our shared space. Well-designed and functional. Simple. What's needed and nothing more.

Oh, before I forget, while I'm typing about dorms and living arrangements. I asked if I could stay in an apartment like the one our guest is in to get a feel for his circumstances, to better understand him, and to be better prepared for first contact. That was a lie. I was envious of his solitude and wanted some of my own. To have my own small apartment to live in, even for a short time, would be...I got told maybe in that polite way that told me no. I won't be getting my own apartment anytime soon.

The person causing the problem seemed a little embarrassed. Little. Always a little. Does anyone here become deeply depressed or wildly ecstatic about anything? No. Everyone here. Healthy volunteers. Pioneers. Aged twenty to eighty years old. Everyone sleeps soundly and quietly. This was very unusual, someone making noises in their sleep for physical, mental, or emotional reasons...for any reason. It made sense that I was asked to intervene. This was my role, attending to issues such as this. I did it all the time, with joy, and had a lot of experience and knowledge about how to resolve this kind of thing.

We went off by ourselves to chat. We have a lovely courtyard in the center of our facility. More like a park, but we call it a courtyard. The perfect place to take a stroll. Beautiful. Peaceful and calming in the way it's laid out and designed. More about our lovely courtyard later. We have a multi-use area that acts as an infirmary, laboratory, and engineering shop. Lots of things happen there that support the facility and its inhabitants. We talked about someone there being able to help. Some herbs. Something to ingest to aid sleep. This would be one course of action. It wasn't quite clear to them or the people being disturbed what the nature of the noises were. Snoring? Talking? Wheezing? A combination of these things. It did come out that they were troubled about a few things, and I tried to put those things in perspective. I affectionately teased them about this. Making things lighter. Shedding weight. Helping people do that. One of my skills.

We got back to the common room, and I told them to get back to me in a few days if things hadn't improved. I had a feeling that this was not something that would linger.

The cafeteria. Great. Something we do very well. Not today I didn't, but I contribute here quite a bit. I cook and clean. Many of us do. We rotate in for short periods. We make consistently delicious food, and it is served up very efficiently in a perfectly arranged setting. My attempts to sit by myself never work. Someone always asks to sit with me. Interrupts me mid-chew about something or another. Chewing on some root vegetables and greens. Always cooked well and tasty, the food.

Someone mentioned a talk was happening down the hall. Meeting? Chat? What is it, this thing we do to make decisions? Let's call it a meeting. That's where I went after I finished my meal.

Still no meal for our illustrious guest. He seems okay. We keep serving it up, piping hot and aromatic, to no avail. Once again, I lightly offered to begin my relationship with him. I was ready to do that. I felt it was time. I'd get him to eat. I would break the ice like a diamond cutter creates a gem. I was confident.

"Ok. Can you kind of come up with a script? What you have in mind for your first chat with him? Possible answers to possible questions? Practice. We want to do this right."

I said I would do that. I had already been thinking a lot about that. First steps. Baby steps. Meeting over. Whatever it is can last all day, or not. Today it was short, and I came in on the back end of it. Fine with me.

My attempts to go off by myself, even for a short while, in the courtyard, never work, as with the cafeteria. The amount of time I get to be with my thoughts, by myself, is minimal. As much as I enjoy my role, it gets to me sometimes. And I don't have that shoulder to cry on that I am to others. There is the rare occasion, and what I do with that time is personal and rather odd, and I would like to write about it here, but not now.

What I would like to write about here, but not now, is this silly game everyone plays. Most everyone. Not me. I don't like it, and I don't get anything from it. I barely understand it, and this is after years of trying. It seems to be forgotten that this is true, because once again I was invited to play, more than once, by several people. No thanks. Really. Next time.

If I walk briskly and with purpose, I can avoid interruptions sometimes for brief periods. No running. No one runs. We are very healthy to a person here, and we get our exercise, but nothing vigorous. Ever. No one. It's just not done. Simple as that.

I enjoyed that for a bit, then ran into some acquaintances. I am acquainted with everyone, but some more than others. That's as far as it goes really. My relationships are good, but...how to put it?

Everything happens at a distance. The small things. The big things. As closely connected as we are, this distance keeps entropy at bay. Do we pay a price for this? Yes, we do. But it's a choice we have made. We made it a long time ago. And that's the way of things. It all happens at a distance. That's a good way to put it.

Our society is closed. Separated. Intentionally so. For generations. Always that. But not completely. No one is prohibited from doing anything, ever. You can read, watch, and consume anything you'd like to, anytime. Some bureaucracy censoring what information you gather for any reason? There is no bureaucracy. No oversight or controls. Individual autonomy. The baseline, default position. Stance. Culture. That's what makes it work. Our trust. Our cooperation. No one tells anybody else what to do. Ever. Wouldn't even be thought of by anyone.

I came across this. I can't remember when or how. Did I read a book about Jean Cocteau? I must have. This was said about him.

“...a gardener of atmospheres, everywhere at ease but nowhere at home.”

That's it. That's me. This is my home. But it isn't. Not in a certain sense anyway. Not in the way most people feel “home” in their hearts. I think I understand what “home” means to most of us, and I have never felt that. At least I don't think so. Am I complaining? Lamenting? I am content. I love it here, and I love all of us. But is there a bit of a scratch that I can't itch? A space? I'm the life of the party, but it's never at my house. At ease. Never home. I put this feeling to one side most of the time. But I wanted to write it here.

A few more problems to solve. Minor problems. I helped two lab techs work through a disagreement about some experiment. I helped figure out where to store some stuff. Some new volunteers had some questions about their roles and how to choose them wisely. I went to the cafeteria and chopped up some veggies. Did a little cleaning, what little cleaning there is to do. Most tasks that would be considered mundane or tedious or unpleasant are taken care of automatically by our technology. Magic really. Not my thing, the tech. To me, it's magic, and I keep it that way. Because I like magic. And mystery.

Two more light meals, along with conversation with others, of course. I sat with a small group in the courtyard and listened to someone playing some music. After a while, we could tell they didn't want us to be doing that; the music was for their own pleasure, so we left them alone.

I took a peek at the dorm where my bed was and saw that it was mostly empty, so I took a nap. In the common area for a bit joking about this and that with my bunkmates. I did get some time for some quiet contemplation and this writing at my dorm today. Doesn't always happen. I thought about my first chat with our guest.

"Hello. I am Margaret. Call me Maggie. I am a facilitator here at this facility. I apologize for not speaking with you earlier. There's a lot going on and you got lost in the shuffle. Sorry about that."

How's that? Too casual? Too formal? No. Good. I will present this next time we discuss it. Hopefully, that's tomorrow.

Six

I need to go to a place. Now. In my mind. A memory. One that I have held onto. Just a moment. Nothing of consequence, and I don't know why it has stuck with me or why I pull it out occasionally. But I do. I've held on to it. For comfort. Like an anchor. When I pull it up, I always think about why it might be so important to me. The larger things surrounding it. Because the moment itself was so fleeting and light.

I can't pin it down, but I was between eight and ten years old and we were at our vacation home in the Caribbean. It was summer, and school was not in session. I had my own room, and it had everything I needed. There were always clean clothes in the dresser, and too many toys on the shelves. The sun coming through the louvers probably woke me. I didn't need to get up for anything that day, and it was early, but I decided to go outside and see what the weather was like.

It was bright and sunny. The sun had just risen. I'm guessing everyone else, my family, my neighbors, were all still asleep because I was alone. That's an important part of this memory. There were always lots of people and activity surrounding me. A noisy, busy household with adolescent siblings and lots of friends. A hectic domestic scene you might find anywhere. But that morning I was alone. No one was awake in the house. No one was on our street.

I was sleepily squinting in the sunlight as I made my way out the door and down the front walk. Not a cloud in the sky. Warm. Bright. Early in the morning.

I decided to sit down on the curb in front of my house. I was still waking up, drowsy, enjoyably so. I had no plans that day. The summer was my own. I wasn't in a day camp and I had no formal activities scheduled. My every need was taken care of, and as long as I didn't cause too much of a fuss, I was free to do as I wished the entire summer. It felt good to do whatever I wanted that day. This is one thing I hold so dear about this memory. The freedom of it. I didn't feel grateful, really, as I had known nothing else, but I was happy to be able to make every choice that day. What I ate. Where I went. What I did.

This moment is filled with me just taking in the morning, thinking about what I might do for the rest of the day. I closed my eyes, stretched my arms above my head and turned towards the sunlight. This lightly warmed my face. The stretch felt good.

That's it. That's the moment. If I had to put a point on it, that's the few seconds that I remember so strongly.

There was nothing in my mind, just the sensation of the sun on my face and the stretch of my upper body.

Joy. Pleasure. Not a profound joy or all-consuming pleasure. Just a fleeting few seconds. A space. No pain. No fear. No pressure. Just an innocent connection to the stillness and quiet that underlies all things. The sun gently infusing that stillness with comfort and light. Light. Not heavy. I was a child, innocent, and unaware of all the things that weigh upon us as we grow into adults. I was free of the pains of adolescence at that point, but grown enough to appreciate...not appreciate. My life to that point was easy. Filled with love and sustenance. I wasn't burdened with thoughts of God, or morality, or my purpose, or the meaning of my existence. My young mind just enjoyed the freedoms I possessed, unconditionally. No responsibilities. No obligations. No job. No task. No guilt. No longing. No want. This moment was empty, filled with sunlight and warmth, but empty. Empty implies a lack, a darkness, a sadness. But this was not that. Light, unencumbered, and accepted with an open heart, not yet understanding the complications of a chaotic world that we all deal with every moment. That was absent here. I'm not even sure what I did with my day after this. I probably went back to sleep for a while. Probably had a nice breakfast and went about amusing myself alone or with others. That's the

thing about this. That doesn't play into the memory at all. It was just another morning in a string of mornings. I have had my share of joy and pleasure since. It was just an ordinary moment. Unemotional. Detached. I deal with regret and anxieties as any man does. Maybe I cling to this memory because of what it wasn't. Maybe now I am grateful for it and cling to it because of its simplicity, its purity, its innocence. I will never feel that again, that ephemeral wisp of contentment. Because of my experience and the baggage that I carry. I don't seek to recreate it. I don't hold on to it in some unhealthy way. It's just a moment in time that comforts me. I was a happy kid. I had nothing to do that day. And that was good. That's all. I'm glad I remember it. I will keep remembering it as long as I am able.

Peace. Inner peace. As adults and philosophers, we speak of disinterest, detachment. A letting go and a surrender.

The Tao Te Ching says, "going from one to two is the origin of all delusion." Yes, that's it I think. A oneness. There was only oneness in that moment. No delusions. No suffering. There was only One there, a connection that I will never feel again. I wasn't attached to it. I didn't crave it. I wasn't looking for it. It wasn't large. Or full. Or anything other than what it was. And it wasn't anything. It was free of everything. I was briefly basking in cosmic rays. Trying to quantify it immediately tears it to shreds. Nirvana, enlightenment, is thought of as some eternal state. This was not that, but a glimpse of it. If I glimpsed it, then I would have been outside it. So I didn't glimpse it. I was it. The One. Not the Two. The Tao. The way. All the tricks and mechanisms and prayers and practices and follies we perpetually stumble over were not present. I didn't know how to pray. My practice was to play. Simple play. Simple breath. At that moment, there was a coming together or a shedding of multiples, multiple anything. Zen mind. Beginner's mind. No mind. No spirit. No breath. No yin or yang. Beyond that. Within that. The words that define a contrast fail here. If you are projecting some kind of hugeness or profundity to this, don't. The moment's simplicity and lack of depth...Depth implies you are inside something else. Not inside or outside. Not two. One. That's why it's dear to me. It was strong in its weakness and eternal in its brevity. It wasn't a turning point or a tipping point. Nothing happened before it or after it I can say had any meaning, other than the unfolding of the rest of my life. The gradual accumulation of cravings and ignorances have clouded over any sight of it. I only think of this occasionally, to mull it over, to remember its purity, to know I was there, on that curb, my face in the sun, my arms outstretched, my mind and spirit free. Just that. It feels good to think of that.

Maybe as we suffer together, I will use this as a bearing on a map. A way to keep my deteriorating mind and body focused and alive. The hunger, the pain, the monsoon of thoughts and fears, the onslaught of insecurities and prejudices and illusions and desires and jealousies and anger and disgust. This place in my mind, this moment in Time, this memory, can keep those things at bay. Even a small attempt to dream this unconnected freedom again can help me now. It's simple enough to grasp, even if my mind goes. It is going. Solitude, rather than my hunger for food, is my biggest obstacle. There is no obstacle. That's two things. There is only one thing. And it doesn't hurt. And it's light. Light to carry. Lighting up the darkness. Sun on my face. Arms. Legs. Breath. Nothing to do. Nothing to do.

I will continue to fast until we have contact. Are you reading this? Please end this. Please talk to me. Let me out of here. Give me and mine, all of us, a chance to work things out. The big things. The small things. If I'm allowed to be with my fellow prisoners, if I am allowed the basic things I have a right to, as a prisoner, I will eat. I will comply. I will work. I will do what you ask. Please.

“What’s the truth? What’s memory?

We should find another name for the way we see past events that are still alive in us.”

John Le Carre

If there is anything I want to write down, a story that I want preserved in this way, it would be the time I felt the presence of angels. Yes, that’s the word, angels.

We don’t mark the passage of time. Our ages are unimportant. I can loosely say that I’m about forty and that this happened to me when I was twenty. Close enough.

Things were going particularly well for me. I was a few years into being a young adult, significantly contributing in a rewarding and satisfying way. Almost like a rogue wave, the joy I was feeling overwhelmed me, and I snapped. Popped a circuit. My thoughts began to race. I couldn’t sleep or eat. I was having trouble concentrating, even talking or interacting with others. I suspended my normal activities as the people around me scratched their heads and tried to help me as best they could. Because of their love and support, this episode only lasted a few weeks.

Since I wasn’t talking and obviously not myself, I was left alone for long periods. I was encouraged to eat and rest. I tried but failed. Most of the time, I was awake and in an agitated state, feeding on my own wildly fluctuating thoughts. Lay in bed. Stare at the ceiling.

People talk of semi-conscious states, some twilight between being asleep and being awake. Is that true? Is there such a thing? In a way, that’s how I felt all the time at that point. My mind was frazzled from constant, frantic energy. Pulsating. Spinning. Like a whirlpool. This moment that sticks in my mind? I can confidently say I was awake for it. It was not a dream. But the quality of my wakefulness was dream-like.

Whirlpool. More like huge ocean swells. There were periods of relative calm that would come and go. I was calm, lying in bed, eyes open, then shut, then open again.

What I’m about to describe happened quickly. The whole thing lasted maybe ten seconds. It’s hard for me to quantify time like this. Seconds, hours, days, weeks, years. It’s just not part of my everyday experience, but I feel it is helpful here. I want something better than “a short time” so I will use ten seconds.

I want to be very clear about something. I want to use the words “angel” and “soul” as a kind of shorthand. All that, all the stuff that is sometimes called metaphysical, it just isn’t part of our day-to-day existence. It’s there, but not discussed or referenced in any way normally. We have an unspoken understanding that there is much that is not part of our physical world that surrounds us and informs us from moment to moment. But it is put to one side. Someone once said to me, “Just call it God. It’s easier.” That. Just easier to use “angel” and “soul”. Whatever baggage you might place on those terms, know that I’m just using them because it’s easier.

“Angel” connotes benevolence. I would say that that is true. What visited me didn’t scare me. Wasn’t threatening. “Angel” connotes an individual, independent presence. I would say that is true as well. More than one. Several. Five? Six?

Silly to do that. A group of angels. Above me. Right next to my skin? Ten feet away? Putting it that way doesn't make sense in the context of what happened. Seeing a deer in the woods. Not like that at all. But above me. Yes. A group of angels. Yes. Unseen. Just present. I was awake, and they were present. I can confidently say that now.

I was lying on my back, and I started to feel something inside me being pulled up towards the ceiling. A physical sensation. A lifting. Let's call that something a soul. Easier. A group of angels were gently extracting my soul from my body. My nervous system felt this. Very real. When you play with magnets. The push and pull of that. The magnetic force you are manipulating. Roughly that. A decent metaphor, anyway. Were they successful? Did they take something from me? I don't know that. The memory breaks down here. They were there with me. They attempted to pull something out of me. They were gone. A linear event in space and time. The whole thing lasted ten seconds.

A completely unique, one-time, experience. Maybe that's why it sticks with me. I don't think about it, analyze it, or try to make sense of it. Why did I feel compelled to put it here? On this page? Because I brushed up against something from somewhere else? The mystery of it? I like mystery. And magic. I refuse to live in a world without those things. I can explain most of what happens to me in my life. This real, no, unreal phenomenon, I cannot explain. I don't try to explain it. Does it comfort me? Does it inform my actions? Not really. Does it occasionally give me pause and ground me in the knowledge that there is another realm, perhaps many, beyond our perception, our understanding, our grasp? I guess. A past event. That lives inside me.

Seven

I was taken from my room. I have just returned and want to report my experience as best I can while it is still fresh in my mind.

The lights dimmed, and I laid down to sleep, as was my usual routine. I awoke in another larger room lying on what I would call an operating table. I was startled and foggy and it took a minute or two for me to realize what was happening. Not blind folded or strapped down, I was free to turn my head and look around. Just to be anywhere else was immediately jarring and unsettling, but my focus and composure returned quickly. There were several people in the room, a room in stark contrast to where I had been. It looked and smelled old. My modern, spare, futuristic surroundings were replaced with something cluttered, noisy, and antique. It looked like a century old hospital or sanitarium, reminding me of photos I had seen taken during the flu epidemic of 1918. For the moment, I was being ignored as various masked personnel attended to other people and lab equipment. The scene was typical of any health related institution one might find at the turn of the 20th century. I kept quiet, remained prone, and tried to decipher the scene. Many sounds. Movement. This was hard to process after the quiet and solitary time I was having before this. Even softer sounds pierced my ears and the light was different and harsh to my eyes. I was in a larger complex. That was my first thought. I will speak with someone. I might be out of solitary for good. Why was this place so old? It had a sepia toned, historic feel to it, like I was transported back in time somehow. It had nothing to do with where I was being held. This contrast was jarring.

I decided to be still and wait. Turning my head only to see what was happening. The gurgle of boiling beakers of liquid, the gentle wheeze of air pumps, the chatter you might hear between nurses and doctors or scientists. "Keep monitoring that and get back to me." "Take this patient to room XYZ." "The levels have remained stable for..." Things like that. The sounds mixed into a dull hum, and I couldn't make any one thing out. Only that this was a hospital. Or asylum. Or lab.

Not Military. How was all this related to the rocket launches I heard? Why no soldiers, or guns, or uniforms? And why 1918? Maybe I was projecting this onto the environment. Pessimistic mind. Skeptical mind. I needed to remain open to the fact that I had very little information. This could be anything. I could be drugged, although I felt alert and aware, and I wasn't dreaming or hallucinating. No. Just take it in and wait.

After an hour or two, the memory of this is already fading and morphing. Two or three people approached my bed or table. Masked. Calm. One had a rolling cart and started doing various ordinary diagnostic procedures. Temperature. Blood pressure. Light pen in my eyes. Fingers on my tongue. Why were there no laptops or tablets or handhelds? Just clipboards and pencils, and two of the three people around me were taking notes rather quickly and deliberately. I heard one of them mumble what sounded like "force feed", but they were masked and the background noise was making it hard to hear anything distinctly. All this lasted around thirty minutes. Then one of them, a male I think, said, "Hello. How are you feeling?" I said, "Okay. Fine. Where am I?" Something like that. He said that in a few minutes I would be speaking with someone who could answer all my questions. All my questions? At this point, I wasn't being treated like a prisoner at all, more like an honored guest. I nodded. He asked me if I could sit up on the edge of the bed. I did. Did I still feel alright? Yes. "Please wait here. Won't be long. Someone will be with you shortly."

I left the room unassisted, accompanied by two other people, and walked down a series of hallways, all on the same level. No windows. Bare walls. Doors every thirty feet.

They deposited me in what looked to me like a military office out of the 1950s. The furniture. The decor. Strange. Was all this staged? The stark differences between my cell, my room, the lab or hospital, and here, this office? Gaslit. Even after fasting and a long period of solitary confinement, I was able to hold on to the fact that I was being manipulated in some way. This felt like a deception. Carefully choreographed. I need to continue to stay centered and grounded inside, inside where they can't touch me. I was holding on to this thought, collating the various clues, connecting the dots, trying to anyway, when a middle aged, smartly dressed woman entered the office. Unmasked. In a suit. Jackie O? Audrey Hepburn? Everything about this. I was now in the late 50s, early 60's. I don't know. This was important. The change in atmosphere from the near future to the 1920s to the 1950s. At the very least, this was going to be one of my questions.

I am unable to exactly transcribe the conversation I had with this woman. But I will try as best I can to remember the crux of the meeting, and will put it down in a conversational format, or not, without the quotes or with quotes? I need to do this quickly, before I forget it. She sat behind a desk that was in front of me. I was seated on a small couch. She introduced herself.

"Hello. I am Margaret. Call me Maggie. I am a supervisor here at this facility. I apologize for not speaking with you earlier. There's a lot going on and you got lost in the shuffle. Sorry about that."

So casual and cordial. Did she not know I was in solitary and fasting?

"Where am I? Why did you take me? Why are you holding me?"

"You are at a secure facility a few hours from where you live. You were brought here and are being held because you have become a danger to yourself and others."

She was cool, but friendly. Business-like. I felt it was best to remain composed and relaxed.

"A danger? To myself? To others? Please explain."

"We live in dangerous times. Things are changing quickly. Everyone needs to keep their guard up, stay vigilant, and do what they can for the common good. We felt it best to bring you here."

"I'm being held against my will."

"That's true."

"And you intend to keep me here? For how long?"

"That's undetermined at this point."

"Why am I in solitary? Am I the only prisoner at this facility?"

"Let's use the word, "detainee". You are not the only one we are detaining. You are alone because you are a danger to yourself and others."

"I would like to be placed into the general population."

"Excuse me for a moment."

Just like that, she left the room. I didn't know what to make of it. No fear. Just puzzled. I was proud of myself for holding up this well. My circumstances were extreme, but somehow I was navigating it well. Calmly. Resolutely. I was alright. I needed to think of more questions. The right questions. I needed to get out of solitary and begin a meaningful dialogue with this woman or someone else. Anybody else. She returned after thirty minutes or so.

"We have decided to give you a small period of time each day outside your room, with the general population, on a few conditions. You need to eat. Can I get you something now?"

As she said that I noticed the faint odor of food, cooked food. Meat? Bread? Was this an enticement? Start to finish, this whole experience, from the beginning of my incarceration, was continuing to feel like a dance, a play, an exercise.

"How long?"

"Two hours a day."

"Starting when?"

"Immediately after you take your next meal."

"What other conditions?"

"That you cooperate fully, do what is asked, and not cause any trouble."

"That's it?"

"That's it."

"I have more questions."

"I will try to answer them."

"Are we at war? Am I a prisoner of war? A political prisoner?"

"Detainee. Please. There is conflict. It has escalated. Hard to define war these days. Let's use the word conflict."

"What can you tell me about your organization? Is that the word? Organization?"

"Sure. Very little, I am afraid. That could change. Things are fluid. A lot depends on you."

"On me? Why? How? You took me. I am here against my will."

"We are currently determining your value to us, and to your own organization. We are gathering intel through a broad range of methods and practices, and are readying a formal negotiation with your group and many others."

"You are playing a dangerous game here."

"How so?"

"If something were to happen to me, well..."

"Well, nothing is going to happen to you. The more you cooperate, the better the conditions. It's on you, really."

"Cooperate?"

"Let's start with a meal. Would you like to have it in the dining hall? Now?"

"Yes, I would, after a few more questions. How else would you like me to cooperate?"

"That's to be determined. It's very possible we will release you shortly if we find you are not a threat. It's possible we might need to exchange some information with you, and we would like that to be as pleasant as possible."

"I have been authorized to negotiate."

"Have you? By whom?"

"By my organization."

"We would need more information and background on your organization before we begin to think about the process and parameters of a negotiation."

"Okay. I will need access to more things, certain things, on my laptop, so I can formalize a response to all of this. How is my laptop being monitored, manipulated, throttled?"

"After your meal, we can open that up for you. Full access. Whatever you want. You are being monitored, but believe it or not, not as much as you might think. We are trying to give you a bit of respect, in hopes of some in return. I'm sorry I can't be more forthcoming about certain things. That will come, in time."

"Okay."

"Okay. Excuse me for a moment. In a few minutes someone will take you to the cafeteria. Nice to have spoken with you. We'll meet again soon. Thank you."

That's pretty good. That's how it went, my first chat. I need to rest. And remember. More later.

“I would like to be placed into the general population.”

That was one of my cues. I was told to excuse myself and discuss next steps if he said anything like this. A few of us were waiting down the hall for me.

“You’re doing well. It’s going well.”

“I hope so. What now?”

“Have we prepped everyone for our guest’s grand entrance?”

“Yes, for the most part. They know it’s about to happen and have been briefed about how to interact with him.”

“He’s the only prisoner. I lied about that. Said there were more. Was that a mistake? Why did I do that?”

“Not a concern. A bit of misinformation at the start is to be expected. We shouldn’t burden ourselves with total transparency at this point.”

“Ok. If he agrees to eat, he gets two hours in the cafeteria. He eats in the cafeteria going forward. Is that the plan?”

“I’m concerned he will do something drastic at this point. No telling. He’s malnourished. Calm, yes, but what he’s writing...I don’t know.”

“Reading his writing. That needs to stop. Now. It’s his private journal. It needs to stop.”

“Are you comfortable moving forward with that in place? It’s been helpful. I don’t see the harm.”

“Let’s build trust. We can’t do that monitoring him the way we are now.”

“Fair enough. Let’s not go too fast. Not now. Ok?”

“Ok. Not too fast. But let’s stop reading his stuff. Let’s turn off the cameras. Nothing bad will happen. And if it does, we will deal with it.”

“Do we need to think about what might happen here and discuss it further? Forever improvising. Must we? This is important.”

“I hear you, but....that’s the way...you’re calling it improvisation. Is that truly what it is, how we are going about this?”

“What would you call it?”

“Even if it is for the one-hundredth time, you must encounter each thing as if you have never known it before.”

“Paul Auster wrote that. It’s how we deal with any situation. Why stop now? Even if we wanted to, we wouldn’t know how. Another approach.”

“We need another approach due to the nature of our present circumstance.”

“We want to come out in a big way. We can’t even get one person right.”

“Yes, we can. He’s going to end his fast. Everyone is ready to meet him. I’m ready for what’s next. He seems okay, surprisingly so, considering. He’s waiting for me right now.”

“Ok, two hours in the cafeteria every day. Just that for now. Stick to the script. Well, the talking points we’ve chatted about. Don’t worry about transparency or the occasional lie or slip-up. Not important.”

“If something bad happens, we’ll pause and talk about it. Deal with it.”

“Ok.”

“Ok.”

Eight

The cafeteria. Not modern. Not 20s. Not 50s. A weird mix of all three things. Or none of those things. Nondescript. Functional. It had everything it needed and nothing it didn't. It reminded me of many cafeterias I had been to before.

Many long corridors to get here, to get to the other places I had been, and my room, but all of it seems to be on the same floor, the same level. I don't remember going up or down or being underground, or being above street level.

You could feed over a thousand people at a time here. Large. High ceiling. The sound reflected as if you were in a gymnasium or hangar or warehouse. Airplane hangar. If you gutted it, it would make a rather nice airplane hangar.

I still hadn't decided if I was going to end my fast. But I was glad to be out of my room, certainly. The chat I had had with Maggie went well, eerily absent of any bad feelings or awkwardness. Two hours out of my cell each day. A better laptop. It was torture, the solitary confinement, but I hadn't been beaten or yelled at or mistreated. And what do they get? A prisoner who won't eat. Typing, at times, subversive epithets and poisonous ideas.

My escorts left me after putting me in the back of a long queue. Immediately, I could tell I was recognized widely around the room. At first glance, no one seemed familiar to me. No one spoke or stared too long, but I could feel an air of respect. Of authority. Of support. I decided to keep my mouth shut for the moment and slowly crept along in the queue with my head down.

We all wore plain neutral-toned civilian clothes, not uniforms, nothing uniform about it. We looked like a bunch of folks outside on their day off in the present day.

I decided to eat. To end my fast. I could always go on strike again. The solitary was killing me. Out here, maybe I could do some good. Maybe I could negotiate the release of everyone here. Was this all of us? Or were we fed in waves? Is this just part of us?

If I eat too much or too quickly, I'll get sick. I put a few greens on a plate, a dinner roll, and some soup. And some apple juice. I thought it best to behave as if I had been eating. I was obviously well regarded by everyone here. I didn't want to make a scene. No rocking the boat, not yet.

It was crowded, but I found a seat quickly at one of the smaller tables on the edge of the room. I took it easily and slowly and the food went down okay to start.

Men and Women. Aged 20-60. No guards. No guards? They must be mingled in somehow. The personnel running the cafeteria were in all white clothes, like undergrads at a culinary school. There was talking, but it was subdued and hushed. No laughter. No tears either. No joy or sadness.

There was a blandness and uniformity to the scene that once again made me feel like this, all of this, was being staged. Staged for me alone? Was this all some twisted game I was playing? What was going on outside and why were we all here? War? Revolution?

Outside. Once again, no windows and pleasant enough lighting. Word from outside. News of the world. That would be my first inquiry. Not now. Keep my head down for now. No one is approaching me. I'm noticed but ignored. Were they told to steer clear of me? An orderliness here. But no sign of authority. If anything, I brought a bit of that in the room with me. Some nods. Glances. Respectfully acknowledging my presence, but not overly so.

This didn't feel like a prison. I had never been to prison, so I wouldn't know, but it felt more like a bunch of industrial shop workers on lunch break. Was it lunch? Or dinner? I thought about asking somebody for the time. Silly. Everyone is in the same boat as me. Or are they?

She said two hours a day. Will they let me stay here for two hours? I decided not to leave until told to do so. Where would I go? I needed an escort back to my room. Is that what was next? People were leaving and entering the room freely, a few at a time. No marching in and out. No one here seems mistreated. No one here seems overjoyed either.

I wish I could put into words the off-putting feeling, vibe, aura I get from everything around me all the time since I got here. My room, my cell, is a kind of science fiction. I can't get a handle on its technology. The smell of it. Not made of wood or plastic or brick or anything I recognize. The hospital, the lab...1920s? Again creepy. Not creepy. Other. Not in my experience. Yes, experience. I was well-traveled, many places and experiences, but all this is not in my register, not in my memory banks. If I didn't know what air was, then I wouldn't be breathing it. That's how unfamiliar this all feels, even though it's a room, a lab, an office, a cafeteria. Spaces I'm very familiar with. Not these spaces, not this space. I don't know what day it is. Why am I not more frightened? Terrified? Losing it? I'm not. I'm okay. Keep taking things in. Calmly. Keep calm and carry on. Hah!

About two hours had passed when I was approached by two different men. They said it was time for me to go back to my room. They told me to leave my food tray and follow them. Okay, time this. Nothing else to do but time the trip back to my room from here. Remember the way. Remember everything and put it here in this laptop.

The implications of intelligence gathering from what I write here...should I be more careful? She, Maggie, Margaret, said I got lost in the shuffle. Delusions of grandeur and paranoia. No one cares about what I write here, no one is even reading it. Is it being preserved? She said my access would change. Will my work be saved as well? Is it being saved? How would a spy deal with this situation? I'm not a spy and do not know how they operate. Not really.

You...Maggie? Hello, I trust we are building a relationship here to our mutual benefit. I trust this process will be conducted with respect and courtesy.

I need a place to jot down my thoughts. The writing helps me think. I'm gonna keep going. I'm gonna keep typing, keep moving.

Moving down one hallway and the next for about twenty minutes. Back to my room. Fifteen minutes? A maze. No shot at doing it myself. This is a big complex. I haven't heard any rocket launches for a while. That's what I'll call them, rocket launches.

The food went right through me. Out the mouth and anus. I feel okay. Some fatigue. No fever. No aches and pains. I need to continue to stretch and exercise. Will my two hours each day be spent in that cafeteria? Somewhere else? Will I see the sky? A yard? Will I be playing soccer tomorrow, chumming it up with my fellow detainees? Have they been given instructions on how to deal with me? Are they prisoners? Are they my comrades? I didn't recognize anyone today, and I should have. I work and travel in many circles, have many friends and colleagues. Our movement is growing quickly as is the number of my working and personal relationships. Why not more about that here? My friends? My family? I don't have time for that. Time. What should I be doing with that? What's next?

Get some rest. Think about what to say, how to deal with Maggie, with my fellow inmates. My every move needs to be carefully calculated and executed. Or it doesn't. I think it's better to leave the pressure of this place and situation to one side for the moment. I think that has helped me thus far. I'm proud of how I have held up. No major crisis or psychotic

break. I'm alive. I'm awake. I'm aware. What I don't have is a clue how to proceed. My ignorance is stifling. If I think about it too much, it gives me the willies. I've had my moments, but they have been fleeting and I'm grateful for that. I don't know how or where my resolve exists. I've always believed, well not always, but for years, I've believed that I'm protected, watched over, supported by a force or entity outside this realm. A guardian angel with all the trimmings. A light that guides me and cushions me unconsciously. Outside of consciousness, but particular to me. Only me. The minimum and the maximum. There's the whole thing and there's me. How else could I be doing this? Why am I not dead or dying? Curled up by my toilet in a fit of terror and helplessness? I'm not and that's good enough. My energy is needed elsewhere.

Rest now. When you wake, you will confront each thing with the repose and poise you now have.

"Even if it is for the one hundredth time, you must encounter each thing as if you have never known it before."

Voila! There it is. Situationists? Important. Important now. Don't project your hopes and fears and what you think you know on anything. That will clarify it. Help me understand it. Then I can make my way. Out of here. Out into a better world. A perfect world, one day.

Interview Part Two

“A gift, yes...but we sought an exchange...of ideas, of kindnesses, of things tangible and intangible.”

“An exchange?”

“Yes. There’s no such thing as a gift. Without reciprocity of some kind. We wanted to be open to any gift we might receive. We did want an openness in return. If you offer some exotic meal, you might want to show your guests how to eat it. Give them a tool to do that.”

“Ok, you drop one person into your world, your facility...is that the word? Facility?”

“Yes.”

“They’re beautiful. Amazing. Magical. There are so many of them now, with so many of us benefitting from them. At the time, how many facilities did you have up and running? How many people?”

“Not many. The one our guest stayed at was the most developed and finished one we had among, I don’t know, several hundred, in various stages of construction and implementation. Well, we had thousands planned, but at the time a few hundred with ground broken. Tens of thousands of volunteers? I don’t know. You need to understand how decentralized it was. A network, a collective, yes, but each place, each person, very independent. Very localized. No HQ. No committee with a capital C. No umbrella policies. Even someone like me, who did travel a bit, did that very rarely. I can try to give you details about the facility where I lived and the time you are interested in. But anything about other places, the details of how our network functioned, not so much.”

“I hear you. That’s one thing that has certainly emerged. Local. The world feels more and more like a bunch of villages rather than one big urban center. Nothing travels. Not people or information. Do you see any downside to that?”

“Sure. Pilgrimage. Rituals. I don’t see why some of the things that were happening on a global scale couldn’t return. But they might take a different form? Be different? We felt a molting was called for. A stripping away. A new beginning. We are always beginning. If you get that, then you get a lot about us.”

“Always beginning?”

“Where’s the starting point on a circle?”

“There isn’t one?”

“Viola!”

“This leads me to something else I wanted to ask you. We seem to have reached some plateau. A good one I must say. More and more of us are being provided for. Resources are abundant and available. There is very little conflict or strife, in the micro or macro. But progress? This idea that things need to change and improve. That there is always something better to be attained. That thinking seems to be withering away. What did you say? Playing in the sunshine? That’s all we seem to be doing.”

“Change isn’t constant.”

“Ok.”

“A balance that leads to harmony.”

“I don’t follow.”

“That’s ok. Explain something to me. This need for progress. This incessant desire for improvement and optimization. The bigger, better, upgrade. Changing, out of a desire to change, and nothing else. Almost a fetish, I would say, informing every action, every thought. You say plateau. On a granular level, I don’t see it that way. Explain this 2.0, 3.0 madness to me.”

“To progress. To grow. To improve. To put one foot in front of the other foot. That’s just in our DNA? You can’t kill the beast if you don’t run after it.”

“What beast are you trying to kill?”

“The one I want to eat? So I can get up in the morning? So I can live?”

“You live to kill. To conquer.”

“I don’t live for that, no. But I need to eat.”

“And it always needs to be a bigger beast?”

“We are engaging in a debate? An argument? When I look around, that seems absent, more and more.”

“What matters to you doesn’t matter to me. You’re asking questions that make perfect sense to you, something you want to understand, but to me, the question doesn’t even make sense. We need a new vocabulary, we need a common area of understanding.”

“You asked me a question.”

“I did. I got an answer. Thank you.”

“Ok. Let’s speak your language. What questions should I ask?”

“I have no idea. You came to me curious about a few weeks, twenty years ago. That’s what this is about?”

“Yes. I did. Let’s begin at the beginning.”

“Now you are speaking my tongue.”

“Hah! Ok. Where were we? Your guest ended his fast. In exchange for a bit of time outside his room.”

“That’s right.”

“How did that go? One quirky thing from his history. “We have been asked not to talk about that.” Who came up with that? How did you arrive at that being the scripted response? An odd workaround. Not only for him, but for your pioneers as well.”

“What comes to mind right away relates to this whole progress thing. This need for clarity. To constantly be in search of better ways to communicate. Better. Improved. Less confusion. We love confusion! As much as you fetishize improvement, we play with the idea of making sense. Play. Work. Understand that we make very little distinction between those things. But play. Poetry. Fun. If I can confuse you, if things can be confusing, something beautiful may occur. Beauty is the thing. Not Truth. Not clarity. This is generations in the making. A teasing. A game. Moment to moment, that’s what we do. So the fact that we threw that in, “We have been asked...” Fun. And it kept things secret. We like that too, as you have come to know. Secrecy.”

“The Calm thing. People are getting that. Using that. The Confusion thing. Twenty years on, folks are still confused about that.”

“Confused about Confusion. Yes. If that isn’t part of the game, I don’t want to play.”

“Don’t get me started about this game everyone plays.”

“Me, too. I’m terrible at it. This is after years of trying. Don’t like it. Don’t play it. Not much help there I’m afraid. I could try.”

“Maybe later.”

“Ok.”

“So he’s out of his room. Eating in the cafeteria a few hours a day. You stopped reading his writing and turned the cameras off as well?”

“Yes, we did. We felt a certain pressure to get the ball rolling. As you know, the world at the time was a mess. A cyclone. We were trying to balance our caution with some action. An incomprehensible mucked-up folly that was us trying to give something away. A big something.”

“The world is a much better place today. Can’t you justify the means with the end?”

“No, I can’t. I’m pleased about current events. They seem like a miracle to me. When I look back, which I don’t, am I pleased about that time? How we acted? No, I am not.”

“You have this easy vernacular. A conversational style. Some folks I talk to are so cryptic. Like the dialect is out of reach, not just the dialect, but the thinking.”

“Well, that was my role. Is my role. I’m trying to play a part in your skit. I have a skill set when it comes to conversations with a broad scope of other folks. I hope.”

“At this specific time, when you first let him out, how closely were you monitoring world events, and how much were you directing his actions?”

“Very little of both. I can see where it would seem to an outside observer or chronicler that we just flit about from one thing to another, and not very seriously at that. We are very focused on letting things happen, as opposed to taking action. We sit on the bank and watch the flow. We don’t build dams. Wallace Stevens said, “I don’t know what to prefer, the beauty of inflections or the beauty of innuendos. The blackbird whistling or just after ...” That. We do that. A lot.”

“And I think you are saying that what I would call inaction hurt you then, due to the urgency, the drama, the tension that roiled outside your influence. Your guest and the world.”

“I guess I am saying that. We were inexperienced with... did I say begin? Experience implies a throughline. We are always beginning.”

“I can see that. His lack of fear. His composure. The effort your pioneers, not your, sorry, the effort everyone was putting in. If you had a plan, a plan like the way things unfolded, I say it was going pretty smoothly at that point.”

“Well, there was a clueless stranger amongst a throng of inexperienced, overeager volunteers. As much as we didn't worry about it, things could have unraveled quickly, it seems to me.”

“Yes, but they didn't. Looking back, why do you think that is? Because of the way you approached it?”

“No, not at all. Many other choices could have been made. Many paths could have brought us here, to this moment. Are you elevating something we do over something else? Please don't do that. I think I used the word folly. I will stick to my previous testimony.”

“Hah! Ok.”

Nine

I've fallen into what feels like typical days, a 24-hour cycle; mornings, afternoons, and evenings. No clock. No Sun. But I do have my own inner rhythm. Yesterday at the cafeteria felt like lunch. This morning feels like this morning. Breakfast came to my room. The quality and taste of the food continues to amaze me. More so now that I know they are feeding a large population. Am I getting special food? I ate a small amount of the large portions. Waffles, bacon, eggs, biscuits, fruit salad. Like you would see in a food magazine. So much flavor, and perfectly cooked.

They were good on their word about the laptop. More open now. Anything I search pops up. My personal files and access to my stuff remotely has expanded. I spent a good part of the morning tooling around the computer, seeing what it could and couldn't do. Still no sound or video. No communication or uploading ability. Read only. But more access. Smoother operation. Quick and open search results. The news is funny. I don't know if I can trust it. It smells and tastes and feels like propaganda. Doctored. Incomplete. The overall message from the articles I skimmed was that society was thriving, industry was growing, and the benevolent government was steering a happy ship through calm seas. No mention of our struggle or activities. Searches pointed at my organization, associates, and fellow activists seemed blocked still. What did come up was skewed, obfuscated, not what I know to be true. I can pull up anything I like about past protests, historic labor movements, bloody uprisings, but the news, the news about Us, about our current movement...I think it would be best for me to ignore and disregard this whole line of inquiry right now. It's murky and confusing and I need to concentrate my energy on what's here, and now.

I am trying to make sense of all of this. I'm trying to connect the dots and piece together what I have seen and experienced in order to formulate a plan of action that will get me out of here and further our cause. If I can get a handle on what this is, where I am, how to proceed...I'm failing. My overall impression is that there is a perfection, an order, an altered reality that is beautiful and pure, yet not aligned with the everyday reality we all experience. My room is always clean. Not a speck. As well as the lab, office, and cafeteria. Maggie. Attractive and neat and well spoken and not a flaw. No flaws. Yes, flawless. All of it. But so much so that it doesn't jibe with my experience. Anyone's experience. It's real. I am real. I am in the world now. And there are cracks and imperfections, but not on the surface. An elaborate facade. A paper moon floating under a cardboard sky. The expense. The technology. The resources. Beyond my understanding, whether or not it is a charade. Keep taking it all in. Trust your instincts. Hold on to yourself and your understanding of your world, the world we all live in.

Same hallways. Same office. Maggie. Would this be the routine?

My chat with Maggie was much the same as yesterday. She was pleased that I had decided to end my fast, and assured me that what we had agreed to would remain in place. She told me that after lunch that I would be allowed to spend the remainder of my two hours in what she called the "courtyard". When I began to ask more pointed questions, she abruptly ended the chat and left the room.

My escorts to the cafeteria were not the same as yesterday. Street clothes. Not a wrinkle. Well groomed. Perfect hair and skin.

Connecting the dots. I haven't seen or heard anything that I would call militaristic. Other than the rocket launches. They may not be weapons. I don't know. The absence of police, guards, soldiers. Dots. Connect the dots.

I had a slightly larger meal this time. Baked chicken. Paprika? Wild rice. Brussel sprouts.

I resolved to introduce myself, and I asked to sit at one of the larger, occupied tables. I was recognized by many of the people here. Not overtly. Not excitedly. But I could tell. You get to know this after years of being in a powerful, revered and public family. Sometimes it causes nervousness, or awkwardness, but not here. Just some grins. Some warmth. A welcoming spirit.

The only thing that hasn't been subdued, calm, understated, and relaxed is my own inner life and its anxieties and fears.

Once again, nothing too much. Just a casual invitation to sit and eat.

Greetings exchanged. Glances. Why did I not recognize anyone? If these folks had anything to do with my activities, I would surely recognize someone. Dots. They knew me. Well. I didn't know any of them.

Cordial at first, the conversation bogged down quickly.

"We have been asked not to talk about that."

We? Asked? What a strange thing to say. Were we being listened to? Why wasn't I instructed to limit what I say? Everyone here seems free and easy and unharmed, but they are not talking about that. Underneath. On the surface. Controlled underneath. On the surface, content and completely autonomous. Is that it? Find the cracks. Get under it. Get beneath it. Find the essence of the true nature of things here. That would be a start.

I asked about the courtyard, and that was okay. What they said about it made it sound like a general recreation area. They seemed happy with it, but not overly so. Overly. Nothing "overly" here. What would happen if I stood up and flipped the table and screamed an endless war cry? How was I staying so calm? Hiding in plain sight is what it feels like all the time. But am I hiding? There is a game here. A manipulation. Theory before action. That's my theory. I'm being played.

Magnificent. Sky. Foliage. Flowing water. The space was about two or three times the size of the cafeteria, more like a small park than a courtyard. Roughly square and enclosed on all sides by walls about a hundred feet high. Vines and hanging plants of every variety covered about half of it, and beautifully landscaped. The whole thing groomed and designed with the utmost of expertise and care. Care. There were workers, cooks, and servers attending to the cafeteria, but no one here seemed to fill that role.

Fountains. Sidewalks. Benches. Gazebos. Wait. Room. Future. Lab. 20s. Office. 50s. Cafeteria? Not sure. Nondescript. This place? My immediate impression was Asian. Modern Asian? Japanese? I strolled through a rock garden. Bonsai. Yes, the air of the place reminded me of Asia. Era? Not sure. Here I was in this beautiful, large, crowded arboretum after being alone in a one room for weeks. I forgave myself for being a little thrown and confused. It was a lot to take in, and it was sublime. I was overwhelmed. Emotional. For the first time since being taken, I cried. Tears of joy. Of longing. Of remembrance. Of gratitude. Not of fear, but of vulnerability. I was glad to have this place, now. Simple as that. Happy in my decision to cooperate and reach out to my captors. If I knew nothing else about them, I knew now that they had unlimited resources, and artistry, and ability. Beyond what was known by anyone or any one group back in reality. Was this real? So immaculate. Peaceful. Had I been in a more beautiful place? Did it feel like that because of the past

weeks of incarceration and solitude? Just take it in. You need this. Focus on the beauty of it. Lose your focus. Just for a minute.

"It really is something, isn't it? This courtyard. I love it here."

"Oh, I'm sorry. You startled me."

"I'm sorry. And I regret to inform you that it's time to return to your room."

"How was this built? How long did it take? How is it maintained? I don't see any staff."

"I've been asked not to talk about that. This way, please."

I've been asked not to talk about that.

"Will I be able to return to this place tomorrow?"

"Yes, of course."

"Will I be speaking with Maggie again?"

"Maggie?"

"The woman I've spoken to twice now."

"I don't know anything about that. This way."

Will tomorrow be exactly like today? How do I crack the veneer? The facade? I want to begin talks in earnest, but I want them to bear fruit. How will I get out? Will I slowly lose myself here? Am I being gaslit? Driven mad? How do I hold on to myself? How do I secure my release? I do these things by remaining strong, calm, and centered.

That boy. On the curb. In the sun. Stretching. Who knows what the day will bring?

Theories. Doors of perception. The senses. Dots. More like wisps of smoke. Maybe I'm wrong about all of this. Maybe I don't recognize anyone because I'm being held by forces sympathetic to our struggle. Or my family. Maybe this is their idea of summer camp. Maybe this has nothing to do with any of that. Maybe the definition of the word "maybe" will slip through my fingers and dissolve into the Abyss.

"A smile on your lips, a song in your heart, and a skull in your pocket."

Where was that from? Why has it stuck with me? Dada? Be happy you remember it.

"A smile on your lips, a song in your heart, and a skull in your pocket."

I went up on the roof today. The top of the wall. The wall that surrounds our facility. It's the only time I feel truly alone. Some quiet time. For myself. Our spot is in a wooded area, a few hours by car from anywhere else. It has a large perimeter wall, a hundred or so feet high and thirty or forty feet thick. Vines hang down from it in the courtyard, making beautiful patterns, part of the exquisite landscaping and design. Truly beautiful, the courtyard. Surrounded by vines hanging off a tremendous wall.

No one knows I do this. It's not that it's prohibited. Nothing is prohibited. It's just that it's something I want to keep to myself. If anyone found out I spent time alone on the roof, they would probably just shrug their shoulders. I keep it a secret, just the same. It makes it more of a solitary space, knowing no one knows.

It's not easy. I have to wait till no one is around, which is not very often. There is a ladder I need to climb to get up there, and I wait till I can do that with no one seeing me. It's a trick, but once in a while, I can make it happen.

Among the vines hanging down the wall is a ladder. Old. Wooden. It doesn't serve a function. I guess maybe it did during construction, I don't know. One thing I love about this place is the fact that since there was no need to remove it, it's here now. It goes up at a slight angle for thirty feet or so, then hugs the wall to the top. At that point, it's surrounded by a metal safety cage. There are also guy wires that hold the thing in place.

The rungs are wide and stable. Most of your foot fits on them. You have something sturdy to grab as well. So it's not an easy climb, but it does feel solid and safe. I take my time. I stand at the bottom for a few minutes usually, gather myself as I look up the wall. The angled bit before the safety cage starts is the biggest challenge. I don't look down and I try not to think about it too much. Slowly. One rung at a time. I've never slipped or felt in danger. Just climbing.

When you get to the top, the metal safety cage surrounds you, and there is a padlocked hatch, or door, or gate (what's the word? portal?), which when opened, gets you onto the roof, the top of the wall. A wall about thirty or forty feet thick. An old padlock. Literally nothing is secured in this way here. A total anomaly, this lock. It's from another time. I guess I could have thrown it out the first time I unlocked it, but I didn't. I use the lock. I can't remember how I came by the key. I can't remember where. Is it the only key? Not sure. I keep the key hidden and I don't talk about it with anyone. Secret.

The cage you escape from is a bit rusty, and the hinges are a bit creaky, but with some force, it opens and closes. Getting out of the cage onto the roof is easy enough. It takes me twenty or thirty minutes total, this climb.

It's perfectly flat and clean, the top of the wall. There's some technology at play throughout the facility that keeps most everything clean all the time. I don't even think about it or speculate as to what it is or how it works. I've never been interested in any of that. My environment. Clean. Always been that way. I usually walk for a while, and look out at the tree line, the woods that surround us. Today was temperate. Partly cloudy. Not windy. A nice day. That's all you see, tall trees, no matter where or how far you look. There is another identical caged ladder that goes down the outside of the wall. Never used it. When you look over the edge, you can see a gravel perimeter road about fifteen feet wide against the wall.

Is it a ritual? What I do here? It's the same every time, intentionally so. I sit and pull out my small velvet sack of rocks, gems, and crystals. Nothing special. Like a bag of marbles some child might have as a toy. Again, no one knows about this. Do I feel comfortable writing about it here? What if someone reads this? How do I keep this writing a secret? Would anything happen if it was found out that I keep a journal and play with marbles on the roof? No. Nothing would

happen, but it is important to me. These spaces are my own. I want to keep it that way. Self-conscious? In any way? Not me. Not anyone. Not part of the equation. We don't do that. But I do this. The roof. The rocks. Time alone.

I sit and arrange the rocks on the ground into various shapes. I clear my mind. I ease into a very calm, meditative state. Sometimes what I call myself, the I that I cling to, merges, melds, blends. With what? A presence? Not angels. Nothing like that. That was a one-time, singular, unique experience, which I described in a previous entry.

A small ice cube, slowly melting into an ocean. The ocean being a presence of some kind? I don't know. I use the gems as an anchor. They are nothing special, these stones I have collected over a long time. Of no particular value to anyone else. They amount to a small handful. But by the act of arranging them into different shapes, I can somehow dance between worlds. Worlds? I can somehow be here, there, and everywhere all at once. I've heard and read about out-of-body experiences. Is it that? Similar to what is described in those instances? I don't know. Looking down at my body from above. What happens is nothing like that. And it only happens occasionally. To swim in this sea, is that my intention or practice? It is not. I climb the ladder. I sit on the top of the wall and play with gemstones. Most of the time it is just that. And that is enough. Is it a ritual? That comforts me? I'm naive about such things. I live in a world of spontaneity and improvisation, the past and future deep in the background. We don't have rituals. Traditional, ceremonial acts. Routines shared by many. What I did today was not spontaneous or improvised. My tradition. My ceremony. My routine. My ritual.

I've never been seen going up or coming down the ladder. And I've done it many times. Sometimes I have to wait at the top before I descend. I've never seen anyone else climb. The ladder is mostly hidden within the vines that spill down the wall. If you know it's there and look for it, you can see it, but it mostly goes unnoticed. There are many things here that are remnants of the past. But they are not thought of in that way. A lamp. A pen. A picture on a wall. If things don't need to change, they don't. If the lamp lights the room, if the pen writes the note, if the picture pleases, it remains. The ladder works. It isn't in the way of anything. I guess it could be used as a fire escape, should the need arise. Emergency exit. Sure. Maybe that's why it's there. I don't know. I know that I enjoy my time on the roof. Some time to myself.

Ten

My conversation with Maggie went about the same the third time. I've spoken with Maggie 3 times? I think so. My questions as to what they want from me and how long I will be here yielded little. Maggie is at once forthcoming and evasive, open and warm yet cold and curt, sincere yet fake, somehow. I asked if I could bring my laptop with me to the courtyard, and she quickly assented. That is where I am writing this. The Courtyard.

It's more like a city park, but they call it a courtyard. There is an order and serenity here that is puzzling, considering the fact that we are prisoners, unable to leave. I am unable to leave. Maybe everyone here is free to come and go as they please. No one seems bothered by being locked up, not at all. Wait. I haven't seen a lock of any kind, have I? My room has no openings, save the bin that mysteriously appears and disappears. No locks. Very few doors. No guards. Maggie and the few escorts I have had don't act like staff. The kitchen is more culinary school than sweatshop. If I were to imagine some Utopia, which I do all the time actually, it would be like this. Eerily so. Have they vetted me completely and absolutely, taking what they have learned and presented it to me here? Now? This place? No one can read minds. I have to hold on to the notion that there is a core tucked away inside me that no one can touch. Mind reading! Brainwashing! Gaslighting! Hah! Are these things possible? I wouldn't be aware of it if it is possible. That's the point. So I have to put all that to one side, true or not, and proceed as if I have some agency, some control over my thoughts and actions. That all this is some kind of projection, illusion, manipulation? Can't go there. Not helpful.

The Courtyard. The park. Truly lovely. In every way. The smell of plant life. The landscaping. The urban design. The acoustics. Like my room, it's clean. Beyond clean. There must be some automated, self-cleaning technology at play here. I need to ask about that. Plants, flowers, trees, shrubs, vines, a wide variety of flora, but no fauna. No animals. Cats or dogs or anything else. No bugs. No worms. How is that possible? No fruits or vegetables either. This is real. I have to believe that. But the atmosphere, the ether I swim in, is outside my experience. Outside my frame of reference. Familiar. Comfortably so. Yet Other. Not a dream. Not out of body. Ethereal? Idyllic?

I like it here. For now, that's good enough. I'm glad to have made the decision to be out of solitary. To cooperate. Well, two hours anyway. Maybe I'll ask for three or four hours. When will an interrogation begin? Am I in danger? When will my circumstances change? Even a little?

I wanted to describe the Courtyard more. Write my impressions here. That's why I brought my laptop.

It's not flat. I am on a rise, a small hill, on what seems to be a grass covered rock, on an ergonomically designed bench for three. So good, it doesn't even feel like I'm sitting on it. Yet nostalgic. Like a bench in Paris in the Belle Epoch. Not Paris. Tokyo. Kyoto. The noise and activity here is subdued. Like a church or library. I hear voices, flowing water, the occasional laugh, but never a shout or bang or anything harsh. There is no vigorous exercise going on, no large gatherings, no public address system or concerts...Music! How long has it been? There must be music here. I will search for it.

It didn't take long. I'm back on this rock after finding a woman under a tree playing what I would call a small harp or lyre. Not recognizable. She didn't have a name for it, couldn't remember where she got it, and really wanted to play it and not talk to me. No audience, but people passing by were noticing and enjoying it. There is an ease here. Nothing is

forced. The music she played was not loud or hurried and only for her. Really good. A true musician. Original compositions, inventions, themes, as far as I could tell. Really enjoyable after not hearing music for so long. She stopped. Seemed bashful in my presence. So I left her and came back here.

From this bench I have a good view of a large part of the park. It's been sunny both days I have been here. A few clouds. The sky and the sun and the open air nourish me. Clear my head. It feels like rest here, unlike the monotony of my room.

Hanging vines and plants spill over the tops of the hundred foot walls that enclose the park. They cover about a half of the wall surface all around, and they are arranged and growing in beautiful abstract shapes, just enough to break up the stark verticals. Brick? Wood? Are the walls made of the same material that my room is made of? From here, I would say yes. Pleasant uniformity. Tight design. Yet artful. Crafted. That is the overall impression. The impression you get from a rock garden, or a bonsai, or an Asian temple. Functional and moderate in its decoration.

The walkways are wide enough for six to eight people across. A few bridges. Over a few small bodies of water. A few small waterfalls. The fountains are intricate and delightful. The water spouts do a choreographed dance, and change randomly in their arcs, in their pressure, in their trajectory. Other than the fountains and a few short fences here and there, there is no sculpture or art. The whole thing is Art. The rock gardens are something, but they are devoid of sculpture. The gazebos are simple, yet cleverly constructed. What else is here? Do I see anything I need to check out? Is anyone playing games? Gathering? From here, now, I see none of that. What do I see?

No children. Men and women between twenty and sixty years old. I haven't seen any coupling. Hand holding or kissing or displays of affection. There is an absence of sex and gender here. Men and women, yes. But in a way, sexless. I don't feel it either. The general sexual energy we all feel. The underlying, ever-present mating rituals we have honed to a fine degree are not evident, in myself or anyone else. Connect the dots. How does the lack of sex and gender and mating link to the other things I have observed?

No ceremony. No ritual. No rank and file. Even the lines at the cafeteria are effortless and easy. The opposite of captured souls waiting out their fate. Not that I have experienced prison life, but the impressions I have of that in my mind are not here at all. Is everyone overjoyed and giddy to be spending an afternoon in a welcoming, wonderful, warm arena? No. Is anyone depressed or anxious or fearful or downtrodden? No.

No large gatherings. But I do see small ones. Groups of five or six seated on lawns. Comfortably enjoying each other's company. Comfort. Well-being. Contentment. These are the words that keep surfacing as I try to set the scene.

I sat with one group for a brief period. Once again, I was recognized but not addressed or greeted. Just nods and glances that told me they knew about me. I have to speak first, always. No one has approached me or asked me anything, other than my escorts, who only say what they need to say, nothing more. Confrontation seems like a bad idea, so when I get, "We have been asked not to talk about that," I move on. What information have I gathered? Very little. Practical advice about the cafeteria. Areas of the courtyard I need to visit. Encouragement not to worry. The small talk amongst themselves is not small. Cryptic. Poetic. Lots of silence and long pauses. When I don't seem to be getting anywhere, I disengage. Am I afraid to push this? Am I bogged down by ten thousand questions and curiosities? If I rock the boat, back

into the hole I go? Continue my fast? I would lose the park and what little I have gained thus far. This park is everything it needs to be and nothing more. The people here are not happy or sad or bothered or angry. Baby steps. More days in this park. More information, gently extracted. That seems the best course of action. Maybe a bit of confrontation with Maggie tomorrow if I see her. Maybe not. I'm fine for now. Fine. Satisfactory. Does it help, would it help, to fret about the world outside? Wait! The first rocket launch I have heard here in the park. The sound is clearer. A large missile or rocket. Yes. I don't see it or a contrail. A weapon? Killing mine? Killing the peace? Going into space? A satellite delivery? A satellite for the surveillance State? Friend or foe? If I discovered I was being held by my own side, would that surprise me? Infuriate me? I'm not sure. I need to put aside my disconnect and embrace the Big Connect. Here. Now. I have my wits. I am pain free. Fit. Aware. Ready for what comes. Ready to move forward. Progress. Fight. For Peace. For something better. Something like this. Hah!

Ancient cosmic resonances
 Orbits in harmony
 Balancing frequencies with radiances toppling
 Mystic intervals of noiseless vibrations
 Free attractors careening bouncing dancing distantly silently
 All bound together in separate entangled knots
 Bubbles Gels Spirits Wells
 Spring to life compress enlongate breath
 Mists mysteries magic obfuscations
 Openly hiding connected masked glares
 Blinded knowledge escaping crevices
 Scraping chafing caressing obsessing
 Bound up bound down wobbling elliptically
 Scripted pretensions ascensions
 Signal path crowded lines circling
 Constant a constant the constant
 Isotropic fluence and flux transmorphic generations
 Gyrating Spinning Reflecting
 On glassy electric gamma schematic entropic pulses
 Brane inflated quanta passively glued
 Misconstrued methodically hued
 Moon Sun Stars Sky Sun Moon Sky Stars
 Galactic String Matrix SuperCluster SuperNova Supersymmetry
 Integral path puzzling horizon hexagonal verse
 Form forming formation formative formatta fermatta
 matter splatter splat Chit chat Ratta Tat Tat
 Traction Tide Slippery Slide
 Tans and hides burning smoking smoldering glowing
 Past pastoral phasing perturbation
 Plane of reference lost in mistranslated conflagrations
 Trajectory Modal Plank Parsec Open Clusters
 Structurally sound joints brackets rivets rivulets machine tool sprocket
 Universalis Solace Solstice Phasing
 Inaudible overtones of harmonic convergences

Patterns Matrices Emissions Celestial Twins
 Sensually recognized numerical proportions
 Distortions Noisy Concordances Circular Assertions
 Polyhedrons Antiquated Eccentricities
 Maximum Polyphony Minimally Monophonic
 Ratios Relatively Imitated Emulated
 Inaccurate Measurements Imperfect Benefits
 Variations Proportions Insoluble Solutions
 Encompassing Composed Modern Explorations
 Periodic Integer Random Orbs
 Muddy Vestiges Of Decay And Rebirth
 Mirth Momentum Shift Circumstances Of A System
 Process Processing Procreating Ovulating Nesting
 Unstable Interactions Fractions Sums Slips Drips
 Binary Analog Drops Beads Stains Wanes Waxes
 Axis Stabilization Synchronized Approaching
 Critical Mass Critical Sass Critical Lass Critiquing
 Gluon Neutrino Gapped Rings Knotted Strings
 Concurrent Application Perihelion Mode Trip
 Spiral Helix Inclined Proximate
 Oscillations Concurrent Striations
 Rotational Tilt Gradually Depleted
 Destabilized Ringlets Inclined Consequences
 Triangular Conjunctives Forbidden
 Ribbon Comet Asteroid Belt Melts Dissipates Whispers
 Graphically Represented Intuitively Understood
 Inclined To Facilitate An Avoidance
 Simulated Embryonic Primordial Discs
 Liberating Relating Confirming Bodies Migrating
 Dynamically Insignificant Mismatched

Ancient Cosmic Resonances

Eleven

I spoke with Maggie again today. I wanted to transcribe our conversation here, as best I can, while it's still fresh in my mind. Using quotes, even though it might not be exactly word for word. I feel this will better convey the tone and nature of our talk. Both of us are still treading lightly, being cordial and civil. But there is an underlying tension. An unspoken acknowledgment of our situation. Our positions. Our agendas. The need for a change. A way out of the stalemate. An endgame.

Same office. Sometime before lunch.

"Why am I here?"

"Well, I think you can answer that question yourself."

"I'd like you to answer it."

"We feel it best that you remain here for now, due to the fluid dynamics that surround your current activities."

"My peaceful, legal activities? Labor?"

"We feel it best that you remain here. For now. Not long."

"Who are you? Who do you represent?"

"Call me Maggie. I'm a liaison. A spokesperson. A counselor. A facilitator. I represent a rather large interest."

"Interest?"

"Yes."

"Corporation? Government? Conglomerate? Network?"

"Interest."

"Are you authorized to negotiate with me?"

"When and if we feel the need to do that, yes, I am. Others would be involved as well."

"Do you have any questions for me?"

"We have all the information we need for the moment. Is there something you would like to share with us? Now would be a good time."

"Can you tell me anything about what's happening in the world right now? Any talks? Have things become violent? What are those rockets I hear?"

"Rockets?"

"Rocket launches. I've heard about eight of them since I've been here. Are they missiles? Weapons?"

"This is a large facility with lots of things going on. I'm not aware of any launches. I think if there were that type of activity, I would be aware of it. But not necessarily. I personally have not heard any rocket launches. Or sounds that could be misconstrued that way."

"You live here?"

"Yes, I live here at the facility."

"How many people are here at this facility? How big is it?"

"Big. I don't know how many people are here at the facility at any one time. A lot."

"You're holding, I don't know, a thousand folks. What else goes on here? Is it just a prison?"

"I feel you are mis-characterizing what this is, what we are. We are holding you, that's true. I'm not at liberty to discuss the status of anyone else you have met, including me."

"I'm the only prisoner."

"Detainee. What is the delineation of everyone else here? I can't talk about that."

"What I get all the time is this. "We have been asked not to talk about that." What's that?"

"Pretty clear. We have asked the people you have come in contact with not to talk about whatever you are asking about."

"Why have you not asked me not to talk about anything?"

"Should we?"

"I don't know. You say you have all the information you need. It would be fair to say you have me at a disadvantage. I'm the one being held."

"That is fair. I'm not sure what more I can say. Let's talk about you here now. Is there anything we can do for you? Besides these questions you have that I can't really answer."

"Can I spend more time outside my room? Can I have a tour of the facility? Is there anywhere I can go other than the cafeteria and the Courtyard?"

"How much time would you like?"

"How much can you give me?"

"Excuse me for one moment."

She left the room quickly. She was gone for maybe thirty minutes.

"Where did you go just now?"

"I'm sorry. Can't. We can give you access to the cafeteria and courtyard for four hours a day, starting tomorrow. At this time, just that. The cafeteria and the courtyard."

"Thank you."

"You're welcome."

"How long will I be here?"

"Not long."

"Weeks?"

"Not long."

"Months?"

"Not long."

"How is my family? My loved ones? My friends? Do they know I am here? Can I send them a message?"

"They are fine. Good. Yes, they know you are here. Well, they know we have you."

"Are they trying to contact me? Secure my release?"

"Again, sorry."

"Can you tell me anything about the current political situation? The nature of our, let's call it our, relationship? As it stands now?"

"No."

"I guess that's it, then, for now. Thank you for treating me as you have been. The solitary has been tough. The time outside my room is appreciated. I'll keep waiting. I won't cause any trouble. Thank you."

"Thank you. Enjoy your lunch!"

And with that, she left. Will I talk with her tomorrow? Ever again? What to do? Stasis. That's the word that comes to mind. Stasis. Not sure how to break out of it. Just wait? For what?

We thought it best not to overwhelm our guest with too much information. Our transports. Connecting hundreds of facilities all over the world. He hears them. Are we up to a thousand? More? Best he takes in this one facility, for now. I have to agree with that.

Today was unusual. And I wanted to write about it here. A travelog of sorts. I visited three other facilities in various stages of development. It's a rare occasion that I or anyone else leaves a facility. We are, to a person, very localized, not only in space, but in thought. The great majority of us have never traveled anywhere. Each place is an independent, self-sustaining community that has very little contact with anyone or anything else. But now, due to our somewhat urgent and extenuating circumstances, it was decided that I should check in and consult with some other people who share my role as liaison and coordinator, in hopes of sharing helpful information about our overall plan, such that it is. Short term. Inviting a select group of new volunteers into our home and hearts. Long term. Giving everyone everywhere an opportunity to live as we do.

Our transportation system is wildly disproportionate to how much it's used day to day. I guess it was used more in the beginning, for getting cargo and people in the right place. Construction. Basic logistics where none existed. Support. Finding footing at the start. Let me write here that our technology, our engineering, the magically automated way that things large and small work, is something I do not know about, or care to know, frankly. Much of the time there isn't even a button to push or command to voice. It's always been there, consistently supporting our everyday lives in ways apparent and transparent. My vague understanding is that we figured out how to create and harness energy in the same way that the Sun creates and releases energy. Fusion. From this many things followed. Abundantly. Endlessly. Easily. I'm grateful for all this, but have little knowledge of it, intentionally so. I have other interests. Our tech affords me those pursuits.

I visited a facility very similar to ours, but at an earlier stage of development. About a tenth of the population. Newly constructed. Finishing touches underway. All the same elements; the dorms, the cafeteria, the courtyard, the lab, etc. But all these things had a slightly different ambiance. Design. Our courtyard landscaping has an Asian aesthetic. This courtyard, more African? I am naive about the varied cultures of the world, their histories, and their components. I was at the same facility with a slightly different look and feel. That's about all I can write about that.

I was greeted by someone who plays a similar role to mine. First meeting. They were younger than me, and less experienced. It was their idea that I visit. They wanted some advice. Some insight. We strolled and chatted. We had a meal. I met several other volunteers. They were curious about our guest, but I demurred. That was decided before I took my trip. Just better to leave that alone for now. I tried to be encouraging. I was encouraged. But I didn't have the answers to a lot of their questions. Logistical questions. Tech and engineering questions. It was decided that a visit by some more qualified volunteers was warranted. And that that would happen soon. We touched on current world events. They seemed more informed about that than we were. More in tune with what was coming. What needed to be done. All our efforts were focused on our guest. Their efforts were more broad-ranging. What little I had to offer them was a help. They said so anyway. Civil. Polite. Gets in the way sometimes. Hard to decipher the subtle myriad of social cues that infuse every situation with calm and repose. Thank you. Keep in touch. That was it.

My second stop was at a facility more agricultural. A supplier. A grower. A distributor. Each place takes care of themselves. Independent. Self-sustaining. However there is a tacit understanding that goods and services can be requested and easily obtained at any time. From places like this. Hydroponic. Large. Nonagricultural supplies as well. What don't they do here? What problem could not be addressed? Resolved? This was my request. I had heard of facilities like this, but I had never visited one.

My tour lasted several hours and was comprehensive. As fascinating as the infrastructure was - magic, smoke and mirrors, I'll leave it at that, my questions had to do with the personnel and their day-to-day lives here. This place was ten times the size of my home, yet there were far fewer volunteers residing there. Many jokes and asides about how the place runs itself. Automation. Machine learning. Robust, redundant processes, methods, procedures, techniques. There really was no need for more crew, and that crew was refreshed and replaced often with new volunteers who could easily and quickly pick up the required tasks and activities. That was one thing confirmed by my visit here that I truly loved.. Economy. Efficiency. Only what was needed and nothing more. Always. For all things. Not just the operational aspects, but all things, ephemeral and permanent. Thoughts, exchanges, large systemic concerns and small contrivances. The people here spent much of their time as we do. Leisure. Contemplation. Games. Art. Not the celebration of one person's game or art. The game and art of everyday experience.

"A philosophy of leisure; each individual's everyday rediscovery of his or her own life in play."

Don't ask me where that's from. Or where I came across it. The Situationists? I know it's old. Something that stuck to me. As little as I reference anything from the past, that remains filed away somewhere.

My third stop was to a facility for the infirm and debilitated. Much smaller. A hundred folks, staff included. Fewer spaces, laid out differently. More like a large home than a facility. I was curious about this. They had questions, too. I struggle with this facet of our society. Segregated. Isolated. A leper colony some would say, and rightfully so. I hold onto the fact that this facility, and others like it, evolved from a perspective of efficiency rather than malice or neglect. Our dream is to be fully integrated, everyone, everything, man and machine, rock and flower, sigh and shout. We have been developing that for generations, yet we are embryonic, formative, a pupa. Is now the time to share our abundance? Is our gift sound? Now has to be the time, and this facility will be desperately needed I am afraid. Conflict. Violence. This is occurring as I write this. In a more widespread and consequential way than ever before. That's why I am writing this. It's why we took our guest. We hope to insert ourselves and help alleviate the tension. Help map a way forward.

This place works. Everyone is treated with respect and dignity. Independence is as much a part of this infirmary as any other node in our network. Celebrated here. The volunteers who contribute do so with an open hand and joyous heart. I left them with the promise that they would not be overwhelmed, no matter what might happen in the future, a future fraught with uncertainty. I believed that.

Twelve

"There's a crack in everything.

That's how the light gets in."

Of course, that's Leonard Cohen...just looked it up. Lyric from the song "Anthem". I was watching some British crime drama, and a detective said it, in passing. That's where I first heard it and it stuck with me. It points to some Truth I am too young and too naive to even have a clue about, but that's it...there is a crack in everything. Crack has a negative connotation, but it can be a neutral, even a positive word, I think. A crack in the door. The crack of a bat. No time for this. I've been looking for a crack, a clue, some light, and one appeared. And I want to write down everything I remember about it as quickly as possible before I forget it.

I was following my normal routine, tooling around my laptop, looking things up, reading the odd news I believe is fabricated, misinformation, propaganda. Art. Links. The type of web surfing that is common. Just clicking here and there, waiting for my lunch or my time outside my room, happy and excited that that time would be expanded to four hours. A window popped up, not related to what I was doing, about a quarter size of my screen, the lower right-hand corner. For the first time, it was video, and sound. I was startled, and it took a second to focus on it. It lasted about ten seconds, I'm not sure. It was grainy, the sound muffled. It was about four or five short shots of massive crowds on the streets of four or five cities. A protest? A march? A riot? It was all of those things, and it wasn't something I had seen before. It was too big for that. Bigger and noisier and more electric. Was there an overhead drone shot? I think so. The cuts were too quick. Mostly shots from a distance. I think there was a close up, a view from the street, or two. It all went by so quickly before the window disappeared. I was unable to bring it back up. Remember. Large cities. Thoroughfares. No point of reference here. Times Square? Bigger. The sound, although muffled, had an angry tension and rhythm to it. I don't think I have ever seen anything like this before, the scale of it. If I saw a sign, or text of any kind, I'm at a loss now. I could not identify the people or where this was happening. Paris? Rio? Could be. Grainy. Just crowds. Thousands and thousands of people. Marching? Singing? Fighting? Unrest. Riot. But I did not see violence. Or blood. Or hear gunshots. Or see fog or gas. No military. No uniforms or tanks or horses or shields or...megaphone! I did see one or two people using a megaphone. Yes. As loose as the mobs were, there was some order, or solidarity to it. Voices, yes. What they were saying, no. The Capitol Mall? I'm not sure, but large crowds like that. As far as the camera could show. Five different scenes? Maybe. Think. Think about each scene. How did the video start?

Was there a few seconds of black first? I think so. I hadn't seen moving pictures, or heard sound coming from any kind of screen since I had been here, so it shocked and threw me. It took me much too long to process what was happening. Some black I think. Then a huge street scene with more people than...Central Park concert? V-Day? That. And more. Champs-Elysees? Maybe. Like that. No end to the crowd. Never seen a crowd that big. Moving? Was the camera moving? A wide shot. Filled with fanatics. The sound was a dull, garbled roar. Chanting? Maybe. Then it cut to closer in for five seconds? Two seconds? Faces. Angry, excited faces. From the same location? Not sure? The next thing I saw was from above. A drone? Aerial shot. Bigger. Filled with humanity. Packed in. It was all I could do to make it out from the graininess and poor resolution of the video. Again, a street. Densely packed with marchers? Protesters? Celebrants? Was

this three or four different cities? I think so. My overall impression was one of a mob scene unlike any I had seen before. Not historic, but in the present. How do I know that? Am I projecting that onto what I saw? The scale of it leads me to believe, I have to believe, that these were recent events. Easy enough to doctor. Sure. I was dubious at best at this point as to what I was seeing on my laptop, all the still shots. All the news. But this had a different flavor to it. I was using a typical browser, but no pop-ups, no windows within windows, had happened till now. The window that popped up differed from what I had experienced on the laptop before. Different borders? No border. Out of place, this window.

As I write this, I believe, I hope, that this event was a message. My hacker friends. Brilliant. Could they hack their way to me in this way? Form this crack? Was this just a glitch in my captors code? Have they detected this breach, this anomaly? Will my laptop shut off with my next keystroke? Why give me this? Why risk even the small chance of infiltration? Are they paying that close attention? If my friends did this, was it a message? Am I, is this, part of a grand tipping point? A Revolution? That word. A change? Are major events exploding around the world as I type this? Was this just some stock footage, some small file, snuck past the firewalls of this massive complex? A precursor to more? A message? Will I be able to get a message out at some point? Is my incarceration due to what I just saw? "I don't believe what I just saw!" Hah! Was that Jack Buck? I don't believe what I just saw. I hope my laptop isn't disabled because of it. I hope more keeps coming. They could do this. My friends. I believe that. Or my captors could be gaslighting me. I might already be brainwashed beyond my ability to add this up. I believe that. What should I do? Use this as leverage? To say I could be a pawn in a game beyond my understanding would be an understatement. To say I could be the lynchpin in a sea change of universal awakening beyond all measure would be the definition of hubris. Who do I think I am? Am I important to all of this? Or is this just summer camp for a spoiled, rotten little prince?

It worked. The video. I saw it. Keep trying. Change is gonna come. Yes, Mr. Cooke. Change is gonna come. A smoke signal. It has to be! You can't stop it. You have to talk to me. You have to talk to us. We can build a better world, for all of us. We can. Let's start. Let's just stop it. And start again. This is the crack I've been waiting for. This is where the light gets in. This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine. I will be vigilant. As long as this laptop keeps humming, I will be ready. Ready for a message. I will be open to cryptic gestures, however minute. However cloaked. As vital as I feel this writing is, I need to spend time here away from this writing. Searching. Finding glitches. Because maybe that video that vanished as soon as it played was just that. A glitch. A crack. A place where the light gets in.

Cracks. How do I more systematically search for cracks?

Maggie said they have all the information they need. So they saw that. The video. They planted that. Maybe not. I wouldn't put it past my friends to be able to sneak that into me. Maybe this is just the start of a grand hack, an infiltration that my captors are oblivious to. I need to hold onto that. A text message. How glorious would that be! To send even a dot or dash and have it land outside of here. Somewhere. Glorious.

I will make it out of here. Things will change. I will feed off of what I saw today. Is that happening now? I have no choice but to believe it to be true. I have no choice but to proceed, not blindly, but cautiously. Not anxiously. Methodically. Not coldly. Fervently. Not all at once. One step at a time. Not weakly. Bravely. In this way, I will find the cracks. The light will come in. Look for the light. In my room. In the people I meet. In my heart. In Maggie. In the sky. In the trees and water. On this screen. The light gets in. It does.

World events are at a tipping point right now. That would be an understatement. And it informs our every gesture, every thought, every anxious twitch. Thankfully, everyone is being a bit more frank, transparent, and emotional about how they wish to proceed. Our meetings have taken on an edgy, tense veneer, and I, for one, think that that is a good thing. I'm not privy to all the ins and outs. The dynamics as they present themselves globally and locally, but from what I do know, action, large and small is becoming an inevitability. No turning back now. Everyone knows it. World events. How we react to them. That's what's on the table, being shuffled around like game pieces from moment to moment. I need to think things through privately to be better prepared for the next meeting, the meetings that amount to nothing more than a bit of frustration for everyone. Sick of everyone. What about me?

I seem to be the only one who sees the benefits of a schedule, a deadline, a line in the sand forcing us to act. As the world careens into the Abyss, we chat.

"What are we going to do? A slideshow at the U.N.?"

"Yes. A slide show at the U.N. Exactly that."

"You want folks to give up their culture? Their past? Good luck!"

"At first, yes. We need to exfoliate. In time, the best of everything can come back and play a part. I don't see how any of this works without everyone starting at a default position. Come on in, but please, take your shoes off first, everything else off, for that matter."

"Only way it could work. I agree. Dropping all this on the world without some kind of exchange? No. The exchange is - do things our way for a minute."

"There's no such thing as a gift. Reciprocity. At the core of it, all the time."

"Our guest seems to like it here."

"So will everyone else."

"I don't think you can say that. He's more open to it, to us. Not everybody will be."

"So we are going to have some screening and vetting at first? Our first pioneers will be a select group? One we select? That won't go over well."

William Morris said, "It should be pleasant, generous, and beautiful; that I know is a large claim, but this I will say about it, that if it cannot be satisfied, if every civilized community cannot provide such surroundings for all its members, I do not want the world to go on."

"William Morris?"

"Poet. Activist. Years ago. Not important. This gift, and there is such a thing, is for everyone."

"I think we all agree on that. What's next, that's..."

"We don't know how to argue. And we need this ability now more than ever. I don't see how we can get there otherwise."

"Ok, argue."

“We need consensus. We need to take action. As soon as possible. We never make decisions. Not in the timely manner that’s required of us now.”

“We make decisions all the time.”

“Let’s make a film. Short. To the point. An overview. No sound for now. Let’s start today.”

“Overview?”

“Of our facilities. Our tech. Our people. What and who we are.”

“And we’ll need something written as well. A contract. A compact. A covenant.”

“I’ll do it. The film. I know just who to ask to help me. I can get started right away.”

“How long will it take?”

“A few days.”

“Ok.”

“A contract?”

“An agreement. Parameters. For individuals and groups. Governments. Corporations.”

“Anyone up for that?”

“I can try. Not sure where to start. And its translation. Multitudes. Varied cultures. Languages. And they are all conflicted and disparate. Wealth. Power. Politics. A mess. Just handing out some trite invitation...really?”

“Yes, really. I understand this is complicated, and that we don’t do complicated, but we have to start somewhere. And now is the time.”

“Why is now the time? Yes, the world situation is dark and twisted. Convuluted. But our situation is evolving, burgeoning at best, at worst, well...we don’t have a clue.”

“We don’t?”

“No, we don’t. We play in the sunshine. Games. How it works? Explaining that, sharing that with anyone else? Should we do something? Maybe. What that something is we haven’t even begun to figure out.”

“We are doing that now.”

“Are we? A film? A contract? Naive. Ignorant. Simplistic. Shouting into the void. Well. We don’t shout, do we? Whispering into the Chaos. No one will hear it.”

“So wait while the chaos increases and the void envelopes?”

“Waiting implies you have something to give, but it’s not ready yet. I’m not sure that’s true.”

“We have nothing to contribute at this time. I disagree.”

“We will only make things worse. Unintended consequences. We have no idea how whatever you might be proposing might play out.”

“How we encounter the world, how we exist, doesn’t jibe with what’s needed now. To the extreme, I would say. There is nowhere to start. Film. Covenant. It won’t work.”

“We have resources. New technologies. That can be scaled up. Is being scaled up. The world could use us right now. The world needs us.”

“The world will destroy us.”

“How so?”

“I’m imagining a small child on the seashore. Holding a flower. Offering it up to a towering, monstrous tidal wave. That’s what this feels like to me. Destruction. The aftermath, nothing more than a wet, muddy, empty beach.”

“I see a way forward. Our guest is adjusting.”

“That’s one person. The ideal candidate. That’s all that is. You are making too much of it.”

“We could postpone any action. Suspend this meeting and go back to our leisure-filled activities.”

“No. Not that. Let’s follow through on what we are already doing. Our guest. Should we share more information with him? All the information? He’s not a tidal wave. He can grab a flower.”

“I’m not sure we should do that all at once. We can even present the film before we enlighten our guest. What order this happens in is not crucial. Making something happen is crucial. Now is the time. Would some type of schedule or deadline help?”

“Schedule? I think our lack of experience in matters such as these should give us pause. It’s only been a short while. The world will survive.”

“Will it? Let’s take a look, a long look, at what is going on and soberly assess what that is. My understanding is that more people are demonstrating, voicing their grievances, in the streets, than have ever done so in human history. I watched the film. The one we are not making. Every major urban center is at a standstill. The privileged and their institutions are being attacked and commandeered. Conflict. Violence. It’s out of control and getting worse. There will be nowhere to show your film next week. And that is not an exaggeration.”

“What I don’t understand is how calm, methodical, and pensive we are, in light of that. I’d like someone to speak to that right now.”

“Silence. The answer to everything.”

That’s a pretty good transcription, a summary, of our last chat. Very different. More tense. More urgent. An urgency I have been encouraging. Thankfully, a film is being created. Some notes are being written. I am one of many confronting this. Taking an active role. Acting. Is it a fumbling in the dark? A folly? Do we have the capacity to foment change? Can we help heal our planet? Is our way of life the solution? To write that here feels like so much hubris, conceit, and vanity. Our guest sees something in us. He’s unafraid and curious. I feel that he can help us now, and I will continue to press that point. Can we say we are doing alright with one person and that that success will multiply easily? We can’t say that.

Thirteen

I didn't meet with Maggie today. Is this a coincidence? After seeing the video, no Maggie? I was expecting the laptop to not work, or be confiscated, but here I am writing this. I could use my search engine as before. No more videos. Since that happened, I'm looking for anything out of the ordinary, on my computer or elsewhere, even more diligently. I'm trying to keep a keen eye on everything. The video felt like a crack. Was a crack. More will follow. More cracks. More clues. I need understanding. Information. Intelligence. I'm a one man detective agency hired by myself so I can find a way out of here, either through negotiation, escape, or rescue. Rescue! Maybe the walls of this place will come tumbling down any second, and a mad crazy mob will pour in. Maybe I'll get crushed by that mob, or maybe I'll be triumphantly carried out by that mob. If my hacker friend is reaching me, does that mean he knows my location? Is it remote? My memory of the trip here is a few hours by car, so not bad, but away from the city. A fairly large perimeter surrounds it I'm guessing. Area 51. In plain sight, but forget about getting in. Penetrating this facility is probably not atop a list of priorities anyone has right now.

"I dare you to do a cartwheel. A somersault. Come on! Anyone!"

My new strategy with interacting with the other detainees was to be playfully provocative. Lightly curious, but not prying. Looking for cracks. A smile, a glance, a signal, a whisper.

"Anyone for a race? A running race? Why doesn't anybody run around here? Sports. Athletics. What gives?"

The few mumbled responses I get from these questions are noncommittal and evasive.

I decided to run in the courtyard. No one stopped me, but everyone seemed bothered by it. Making a spectacle of himself. What is he doing? All eyes on me. Disapproving eyes.

I'm not in as good of shape as I thought. I stopped after a bit and recovered, sitting on a bench in the middle of a large, open lawn area. Why don't I recognize anyone? I need to go up close and meet everyone here, take a good look at their faces and strike up a conversation. Maybe something will crack. My memory. A slip of the tongue. Here is a rough example of one chat I've had recently.

"Are you happy here?"

"Happy?"

"Yes, happy. Are you treated well? Can you do the things that bring you pleasure? Do you have fulfilling work?"

"Yes, I'm happy. I do what I like. Work? I contribute, but I don't have a job, if that's what you mean."

"I don't know what I mean. Tell me what you do on a typical day. What fills up your time?"

"I spend a lot of time here in the Courtyard. I spend a few hours a day attending to the facility. It's different all the time. Cleaning. Cooking. Nothing earth shattering. "

"Cleaning? Everything seems so clean all the time. It's like my room is self-cleaning. I never see anyone cleaning anything."

"Yes, great right? There is some technology that does that. Tidying. Organizing. Maybe that would be a better way to put it."

"You recognize me. Everyone seems to."

"Yes. You're famous. Aren't you?"

"I suppose I am. How do you know that? What do you think I am famous for? Where have you seen me?"

"We have been asked not to talk about that."

"Wait. I get that a lot. Same answer. Over and over. From everyone. Who asked you?"

"The people that run this place."

"Who is that? I've met someone named Maggie."

"Oh, she's great. I like Maggie."

"What can you tell me about her?"

"Not much. She's friendly. I don't see her very often."

"She runs this place."

"I don't know that."

"This place. Is it a prison? Are you being held against your will."

"I don't know how to answer that. I do what I like. I'm not a prisoner."

"Am I the only prisoner here?"

"You are the only person I've heard use that word, prisoner."

"Who are your friends? Did you know them before you came here? Where do you come from?"

"I don't know how to answer that. I probably shouldn't."

"Or what?"

"Or what?"

"What would happen to you if you answered a question you shouldn't have?"

"What would happen? I don't know."

"Would you be punished?"

"Punished?"

"Yes, punished."

"No, I wouldn't be punished. I really think you have the wrong impression of this place. Isn't it great, this place?"

"Yes, it is. But it's not my home. I'm being held against my will. Are you?"

"Being held against my will? The short answer to that question is no, not being held."

"What's the long answer?"

"The long answer is that you and I are very different in the way we think about things, frame things, put things into context. Your priorities differ from mine. Your logic. The way you see and hear and feel the things around you. Your use of language. Your core. Your spirit. They rest inside you in a very different way than they do me."

"Really?"

"Really. I shouldn't be doing this."

"Doing what?"

"Confusing you. Our conversation has been a bit too long."

"Long? You have been told to keep it brief with me?"

"No."

"Then?"

"See, there you go. Your response to all this is..."

"Is what?"

"Did you have any other questions? Ones I might be able to answer? I think you know what that is now. Do you?"

"I don't know. Memories. Your childhood? Where were you before here? Tell me about your family. What you were doing before you came here."

"What you think about memory, the past, your connections and attachments, your foundations, well, it's different from the way I think about it. I don't mean to frustrate you."

"I am frustrated. But that's okay. Maybe if we continue to chat, it will be clearer to me."

"Maybe not."

"Fair enough. Games. Do we play games here? Team games? Sports? Parlor games? Where could I get a deck of cards? Wanna play?"

"Yes, we play games."

"I haven't seen any."

"Come with me."

I went with them to another part of the courtyard, a small lawn area where about six people were seated in a circle facing each other. We asked if we could observe and were told, "Yes, of course."

How do I describe the game they were playing? It was some kind of word game, I think. But gestures and looks and other signals seemed to be involved. Telepathy? Can I go there? Were they communicating somehow beyond their speech and physicality? Maybe? Maybe this person was right. Stuff beyond my comprehension. Lots of it here. That's the reason for the creepy vibe. Creepy? Not creepy. Mysterious, and outside my realm of understanding. Will I need to shed my way of thinking, my biases, my rose-colored glasses, to be able to find a crack? To see a light? The Light?

The players were exchanging cryptic phrases. Bits of poetry? Giggling. Taking turns. It seemed to be relaxing them and pleasurable. I guess they were competing. But that seemed submerged and not important. What seemed important was the exchange. A baffling exchange. To me. Then again, I don't know the rules. When I asked about the rules and how it worked, this game, I was told it was too complicated. For me to learn this game, even its rudiments; no, that wouldn't be possible.

I thanked everyone, and went on my way. Helpful, this chat. I am really a fish out of water here. On a very basic level. If I'm being gaslit, it's quite an elaborate charade. Paranoid? Everyone is in on some secret I am not privy to. Even if they tried to tell me this secret, I wouldn't have the tools to understand it. What did they say? Our use of language. If even that is incompatible, then what? Small talk works. It's English. Beyond that, I'm not sure how to proceed. If I can't talk with these folks in any meaningful, actionable way, then what's the point? Do I need to start from scratch? Day one. How do you tick? Give me an exercise. See spot run. That seems daunting. It would take forever. I would begin to lose part of myself. My whole self. I can't. I have things to do. Not long, Maggie tells me. Just wait. My friends and loved ones are working at getting me released. Or maybe what I saw on that video...I'm not a priority. What faith, what hope, helps me now? I shall be released. Any day now. I will see the light come shining. If you're gonna hum a little ditty to keep from going crazy, that's a good one. For now. I shall be released.

Maggie. Another video. A signal from outside. Keep yourself open to openings there. Cracks in my laptop. Cracks in the sky. Cracks in Maggie. Cracks in my misconstrued insights. Let go. See what is really here. And now. Be open to whatever comes. If I see a ladder on the wall, climb it. If I think of a question, a good question, ask it. If I see a dot that connects, connect it. Stay encouraged. I am surprised how well I have held up. No fear. Don't scare yourself. Don't give in to despair. Be ready. Get ready. Keep writing. Keep moving. When the time is right to make more waves, to provoke, to confront; recognize that, and act.

Interview Part Three

“Shangri-La.”

“Sweet. I thought it was sweet when he said that. I thought we were moving in the right direction.”

“Not a word you would use.”

“No. I had heard it. I understood it. But, no.”

“Camelot. The round table. There is no “head of the table”. Not now. Not then?”

“Camelot?”

“Knights. Royalty. Chivalry. Honor. All that.”

“Oh. Medieval? The Dark Ages? Not familiar with that, sorry.”

“That’s ok. No “head of the table”. That helped?

“I don’t know that. Are you asking me to compare and contrast one trajectory with another speculated, imagined trajectory?”

“I am asking if you felt, if you feel, that the absence of hierarchy led us here, now? Kept things from breaking down?”

“I don’t know that. I know it felt right. I know it feels right. Don’t you like a say in the matter? A seat at the table? Respect? To be listened to?”

“I do. I also like to be taken care of. Guided. A pilot. A passenger. That relationship comforts me.”

“Ok. Enjoy the trip.”

“Utopia. He wrote about that. He defined your world as such.”

“Utopia implies a destination. A place on a map. A dot on a line. Linear. This follows that. What if I said that my thoughts, my moments, and my existence, are nonlinear? You are never there. You are always here. What if space and time were resting inside you differently? What if you didn’t think about it as inside or out? What if you didn’t cling to it in that way?”

“So defining it, naming it Shangri-La, or Utopia...unnecessary?”

“I guess. It can’t be a singularity. But it can be couched, framed, set aside, and placed lightly on the shelf in the background. When definition and separation bubble up, it’s just that, a bubble. It pops. Another bubble appears. Is this helpful? Is this what you want to talk about?”

“Yes, you’re telling me this and it kind of makes sense, but for the most part, you don’t tell. You don’t teach. There are no schools, no universities. It’s more of a showing rather than a telling that you engage in. Is that intentional?”

“Teacher. Student. Learning. The sharing of knowledge and experience. Different now. I don’t think it’s a bad thing. It happens. Must we always analyze and look for ways to do things better? Reach for Utopia? Maybe that’s why, from your perspective, that seemed unattainable.”

“What was your education like at an early age?”

“Very independent. I was taught to teach myself. To explore areas of study that interested me. I was told stories occasionally. I observed. I participated. Not a school. Nothing structured.”

“Who did you live with as a child? How did you live? From what I’ve already gathered, it sounds more akin to what we would call an orphanage.”

“I lived in a large home amongst a dozen others. Shared space. Shared activities. You have small homes and nuclear families that make up a community. That is not our model. How you see it today. That’s how it was when I was a child. That’s how it was twenty years ago. I thought you were interested in that? Those few weeks when everything...do you want to talk about that?”

“Did you know that your guest’s friends were communicating with him through your computer network?”

“No, we did not.”

“When did you find out?”

“I’m not sure. Shortly after we came out, I think.”

“Did this upset you? Does it upset you now?”

“No. They hacked in and had access. It did not affect what we were doing, and in retrospect, I would say it was a comfort to him. An encouragement.”

“Any other breaches? At that time, was your security ever compromised?”

“Not that I can recall.”

“And as far as you knew, your activities were secret.”

“Yes.”

“Biding your time with your guest. Slowly exposing him to your facility and ideas. How closely were you monitoring world events?”

“Pretty closely. We were concerned. We wanted to help. We were formulating a plan.”

“How did you do that?”

“I was frustrated that things weren’t happening more quickly. I tried to inject a bit of urgency into the mix. How did we formulate a plan? Messily. We needed structure. Rules of order for our meetings. Regular attendance at our meetings. More meetings. A record of our meetings. Consensus building around a course of action. We didn’t have those things. We didn’t know what to do or how to go about it. Someone joked about a slideshow at the U.N. and we went with that. A few volunteers put that together. I was more involved with getting to know our guest, and him getting to know us. We didn’t have a plan there, how he would be involved. Still don’t. You say you got a hold of his journal from that time? From him? Is he currently out there? As an ambassador? A representative? That was his wish from the start.”

“Was it? Was it your wish as well?”

“We wanted him to be a witness. What form that would take was unclear. If we had a mode of operation, the only mode we knew really, it was to let things flow easily. An improvisation. More concerned with the flow than the thing itself. As dramatic and significant as this thing was...it called for a slightly different approach, but we were ill-equipped to do that. Does that make any sense to you? Important, making sense of all this? It’s why you are doing this?”

“Yes. It is. Although I am intrigued by your lack of desire to make sense of things. Even at that crucial time. Improvising. Playing.”

“It’s the air we breathe.”

“Yes, he is still active. He’s like you. A liaison. A rep. A spokesman. Coordinates with new invitees, and new volunteers. Where there are grievances or conflicts, he steps in and tries to smooth things over. Ambassador, that’s a good word for it. A large, increasing number of people now have an opportunity to live and contribute at one of your facilities. He’s a big part of that success, I would say.”

“I’ve stayed in touch with him, but it’s been a while. I’ve gone to a few of his performances. We’ve had the occasional meal together.”

“His performances. Those began early on?”

“Yes, they did.”

“His idea?”

“Yes.”

“And you just let it happen. Didn’t see any harm?”

“That’s right. I would say they were helpful. They filled a void. They still do.”

“Just simple improves back then, loosely based on the game everyone plays. Is that right? It’s so much more than that now. So many variations. Sophisticated. And so many participate.”

“Yes, nothing much. We told the volunteers to play along and be open to what he was going after. Everyone took to it. It cast the game in a new light. It was interesting to me how well the game adapted to and served his theatrical purposes.”

“Well, it’s a big part of the culture now, and beneficial I would say. One of the few things that has spread across the breadth of your communities.”

“Beneficial, yes. Can we continue this another time?”

“Certainly.”

“Thank you.”

“Thank you. Next time.”

Fourteen

"A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realization of Utopias."

Oscar Wilde. I put the term "Utopia" into the search engine this morning and I've been combing over the results. All the things that stand in the way of providing for everyone's needs, all their needs, should be swept away. We are reaching for Utopia all the time, and we should be there already. It's what everyone wants. Lost Horizon. Someone says, "There's a wish for Shangri-La in everyone's heart." It's not something I need to debate or argue here. It's obvious. It's ridiculous that we are so far from it. We have the technology, the will, the wherewithal to make it so. Most of the time on the ground I am fighting for small concessions, more lighting in a workspace, a few more cents an hour and a few less hours, but what I really feel is that we should be so beyond that. It would be so easy. Nothing to it. Everybody gets what they need. In Peace.

"We will go out into the world and plant gardens and orchards to the horizons, we will build roads through the mountains and across the deserts, and terrace the mountains and irrigate the deserts until there will be garden everywhere, and plenty for all, and there will be no more empires or kingdoms, no more caliphs, sultans, emirs, khans, or zamindars, no more kings or queens or princes, no more quadis or mullahs or ulema, no more slavery and no more usury, no more property and no more taxes, no more rich and no more poor, no killing or maiming or torture or execution, no more jailers and no more prisoners, no more generals, soldiers, armies or navies, no more patriarchy, no more caste, no more hunger, no more suffering than what life brings us for being born and having to die, and then we will see for the first time what kind of creatures we really are."

Kim Stanley Robinson. Well, there you go. I need to read this book. Well said. If we stripped all those things away, the politics, the hunger, the money...we could see who we really are. Patriarchy. Ok. I wonder where we would be if that history was a Matriarchy. Is it Sex? Did that fuel all of this? We need to look back to learn and progress, and the Patriarchy, well, you could lay a lot down at its feet, to be sure...had it been a Matriarchy the whole time? I don't know.

I think the idea of a better world is too easily dismissed, mocked, and not seriously addressed. A few simple steps is all it would take. If certain things were in place, then the chains that bind us would just not be there. Selfishness. Power. Envy. Greed. If everything is provided for, these things would wither away. They are not innate. They would not be there. We are born innocent. All the extraneous sufferings that we endure would be non-existent. I believe that. Faith. Hope. Religion. All these would be very different in a more perfect world. Funny how everyone here, in this place, is just here. Not happy or sad, really. Would ecstasy and bliss be mitigated if suffering and pain were eliminated? Would that be better? If nothing else, calm and peace reign here. No fighting. No shouting. No anger. I haven't seen it. How can that be? Maybe this is the key to where I need to go. If I can get to the root of that, understand the nature of the culture within these walls, maybe I can...question to ask next...do you want to leave here? Be free? Go back to wherever you came from? Your

family? Your love? When I asked about this yesterday, I got a convoluted, evasive answer about memory and...Amnesia? Group psychosis? No. Not that.

"A philosophy of leisure; each individual's everyday rediscovery of his or her own life in play."

Situationists. Paris. That crowd. I think that's where I got that. This is what I'm getting at. This is what I feel should be the natural order of things. Play. Pleasure. Leisure.

"Leisure is the real revolutionary question."

Where did I hear that? Search for it. Lettrist International. Situationists. 50s. 60s.

A freedom to do as one pleases. Daily. Unencumbered by anything politic, capital, religious. I think if that was true across the board, most everyone would act altruistically. It wouldn't become a cesspool of individual desire and gluttony. Quite the contrary. There would be "voluntary cooperation and mutual aid" baked into the zeitgeist. How can you be having a good time when someone else isn't? More fun if everybody is at the party. Leisure. Not Sloth. I can envision a world where games are plentiful and burdens are few. The suffering of birth and death is still there, just cloaked. Obscured. Veiled. This thing, the essence of this thing, is why I was engaged in the activities I was in, however futile or small or inconsequential they felt. Maybe not. Maybe that video I saw was present day. Maybe my activities tipped things in that direction. Maybe that's why I'm here. It will grow, this movement, until my being here is untenable. This place, this facility will melt into the soup that is a real change for the better. Non-violent change. An awakening. On a global scale. Power will shift. Autocrats will step aside. A new fundamental societal structure will emerge.

"Every act is cowardice if it requires justification."

In the first Lettrist pamphlet, I think?

I'm not justifying anything here. I'm not arguing or debating this. I'm shining a light. On this. Utopia. This self-evident thing that lives in our hearts, yet remains a dream. Here's another thing I saved from a Lettrist pamphlet.

"I'm a dream that loves its dreamer."

Yes, poetry that knocks you out of yourself. I understand this. I am the dream. And the dreamer. A dream is. It doesn't need to be justified. A dream isn't. It can't be destroyed. More than most things, at least to our everyday sensibilities, a dream and its dreamer are one and the same thing. I get that. If you peel away the husk, the illusory husk, you see one thing. Moving from one to two. That's where it starts. Back to one. The connections. No. The stripping away of connections. It's all the same. Language fails me. Where it's really bad right now is talking to my comrades, here at this facility. English, yes, but not the same language. Are we really that different? Is there a secret? Some knowledge that anchors them in a place I couldn't begin to grasp? Break it down. Unpack it. Slowly.

Do I keep sailing to Utopia because of what's here? My conscience. Separate. That's Two. If I brought up the subject of consciousness, would I continue to get that quizzical look I keep getting? Is there an absence of this here? A shark. Just swimming. Just hunting. Just eating. Everyone here just goes about the mundane activities of everyday life without a thought. Where's the poetry? Where's the art? There's no need for it here? Is that good? Beautiful? A wish for beauty. What if ugly is not present? There's a Oneness beyond the yin and the yang? And would that be a place in which we would want to live? I need to look for the individual here. The ego. The recognition of one's self as a witness to the world. If I could find that here, maybe I could begin to pry open and expose the secret and the knowledge that escapes me. And that would lead to an escape. A path towards forgiveness. I feel the longer I stay here, the more this desire will wane. Why leave? Shangri-La. What would I be going back to? I can see myself falling into that Abyss.

"If you gaze into the Abyss, the Abyss gazes also into you."

Nietzsche. Must gaze. Must solve. Must repair. Must escape. Where is what I saw on that clip? Was it a mass protest? Was it a celebration? I need to be there. Not here. I want to be there. I still desire my freedom, but I see that slipping away. Like oxygen I no longer need to breathe.

What's at play here? What can I do to make a crack? How do I hold on to the things I need to hold onto? Does it matter? Just relax and have faith the end is near. "Won't be long" I'm being told. "Won't be long."

Everything takes such a long time. Normally this doesn't concern me, but now it does. What are we waiting for? Why the long pauses between everything we say? I could understand if things were more deeply considered, but we are making it up as we go along. The film is fine. A few minutes long. Everything it needs to be. Some fly-over shots of our facilities and our volunteers. Nothing fancy. It's ready. Our stamp of approval is everyone looking at it and weighing in, and it takes forever.

I won't be a part of us coming out to the planet, contacting the U.N., arranging a time for our presentation, all that. Some of us have had a bit more exposure to other groups, and have experience with that. Know people. Have lived in that world. I have not. Best I remain here with our guest.

Everyone. Everyone is an acquaintance, nothing more. I know a bit about all of us here at this facility. I have contact and interaction with everybody. All day. Every day. It never ends. But it's superficial. People confide in me and look to me for support, and I give it, but it's fleeting and insubstantial. Lots of little things. Sometimes it feels like I'm not doing anything at all.

What did I do today? I had several short chats with several volunteers on my way to the cafeteria. I can't get to where I'm going without this happening. It probably takes me twice as long to get anywhere. I am the person our volunteers feel comfortable with letting their guard down, asking about this and that, and keeping attuned to things.

"Am I doing alright?"

"How's our guest?"

"Where would be good for me today?"

"What would be good for me today?"

"I enjoyed myself, but I don't think I'm very good at it."

"I feel awkward. Like I'm not contributing enough."

"I need a break. What would you suggest?"

"I came across this, and was wondering if you could take a look."

"I came across that and didn't think it was important. But maybe it was?"

"I'm hoping I can meet with you later for a more formal conversation."

"I haven't spoken with anyone in a long time."

"Well done. What would we do without you."

My first meal was delicious, as always. Ham. Eggs. Potatoes. Fruit. Biscuits. Our protein, our meat, is grown in a petri dish, not slaughtered. The potatoes are hydroponically grown. The biscuits are handmade. Foodservice is an amalgamation of very old and very new practices. When helping out in the kitchen, you might do nothing more than press a few buttons and serve things up. Or you might be knee-deep in flour with your fingers getting sore from overuse. After my meal, I cut some fruit and stacked some dishes. Could things be more automated in the cafeteria? Wholly automated? Yes, but they aren't. Many of us help out with food service and take pleasure in it. Some don't and are not asked to.

“Every man must be left quite free to choose his own work. No form of compulsion must be exercised over him. If there is, his work will not be good for him, will not be good in itself, and will not be good for others. And by work I simply mean activity of any kind.”

Oscar Wilde. Where did I come across that? Did someone share it with me long ago? Did I read it somewhere? Was it research or did I hear it in passing? No idea. It stuck with me. It neatly sums up our activity and practice.

I spoke with our guest. Answered some questions. That task, that activity, is going well. I wish I could be more forthcoming and transparent, but I understand and respect the need for caution. He’s holding up quite well. I admire him. I like him. He has courage and resolve I’m not sure I would have in the same circumstance. He seems to be enjoying himself, despite the fact that he is a detainee in a strange and foreign environment filled with strange and foreign beings. What must that be like? What must he be feeling? As far as I can tell, his curiosity is clouding out any trepidation or anxiety.

I spent some time in the courtyard, which mainly amounts to more chats. More people, more salutations, more small talk, more interruptions. Another trip up the ladder? Not today, I don’t think. It’s important to me that no one knows about that and I don’t see a clear path to the roof for the moment. That’s ok. Maybe tomorrow.

Someone fell. Cut themselves. We accompanied them to the lab. Lab. A multipurpose space that includes an infirmary of sorts. Our tech, our innovations, our new methods are...first aid? First and last aid? Minor injuries are handled quickly and completely, and I’m not sure how. In a few minutes, it was like they never fell or cut themselves.

No rooftop sojourn today. So I imagined it instead. A daydream. As I strolled in the courtyard. I imagined playing with my rocks. My gems. My crystals. I currently have thirty two and I keep them in a dark blue velvet pouch.

Keep them. Keepsakes. Knick Knacks. Collected, unimportant objects in one’s sole possession. I’m guessing my bag of marbles is not the only thing like this here, but it’s out of view. Not spoken of. Not shared. Not there. My stones are unknown to anyone and I’m not aware of any belongings of this type, anywhere here.

The first thing I do is carefully pull them from the bag and place them on the ground in a very specific order. Same thing every time. From oldest to newest, in a line straight across from right to left. Some are nothing special. Some are jewels. Some I had as a child. Some are newly acquired. I look at them for a while. I pick a few up and examine them more closely. This part of the ritual is always the same. Line of rocks. A pause. Then I begin to arrange the orbs. They are all spherical, not perfectly so, but spherical, all about the same size. Grape sized. I slide them about and attempt to make new shapes. Shapes I’ve forgotten. Shapes never created. Designs and patterns aimed at my amusement, my repose. Distracting and focused. I think I touched on this before. It allows me to straddle two expanses. From a few feet on the ground comes an expanse. Sometimes this immersion is more or less intense. If it were easily explained here on this page, then I don’t think it would interest me. And what interests me is the ritual of playing with the rocks. Sometimes I truly feel displaced, but that is not the goal. No goal other than making a new shape. Surprising myself. Comforted by the sensation of the stones on my fingers. An empty mind. A beginner's mind. I might make two or three shapes, or I might make twenty. The duration of this activity is not important. Not ritualized. When I’m done, I carefully place the rocks in the bag, newest to oldest this time. A memory game I like to play. The start and end of this activity are always the same, the removal and return of the gems to the bag. That is ritualized. Sometimes, this daydream is enough. It has to be. I’m not sure when I will make it back onto the roof again.

What did I do after this? Did I head back to my dorm? Someone else's dorm? Yes, that's right. My dorm, my bed, a nap. I find it easier to sleep when there are fewer people in the sleeping area, so I do this quite a bit. Short rest periods when my dorm is emptiest.

A few volunteers were gathered in our common area and they wanted to hear about my chat with our guest today. I briefed them. Things are tense, but this talk was relaxed and informal. I asked some questions about next steps and got nowhere. Am I prodding? Nagging? Is my concern unwarranted? What's the metaphor? A library. Quiet independent study. A cataclysmic maelstrom just outside. Our efforts seem woefully lacking, in light of current events. Nothing set. No schedule. Normally this is welcomed, but now it seems odd and inappropriate. I feel alone in my displeasure with this. Am I? If I sounded an alarm, would it be heard?

Alarm. Alarms. Alarm clock. Notices. Notifications. Notaries. Time itself. A ticking. A tocking. Not here. Not anywhere. Not understood. Not needed.

I went back to the courtyard and found some music. A soloist on a stringed instrument. Is all our music produced by soloists? Not all, but most of it. Recorded music? Large concerts live via satellite? No. Large gatherings for anything? No. Do I want that? Would I like it? Would anyone? Not even sure those are questions that can be asked. Our music. Five or six of us quietly listening to a soloist practice. Not performing for us. Playing for their pleasure. Ignoring us. Uncomfortable with the attention. Many times the music stops because of this intrusion.

I was interrupted by a volunteer telling me of a problem, a disagreement about some engineering, energy issue happening on the other side of the compound. Could I help? Of course.

Something was broken. That was odd, because things never break. The machines fix themselves. The place runs itself on a granular and systemic level. So much so that most of us don't give it a second thought. Did I write that I regard all the tech as magic? And leave it at that? It was hoped I could instill a bit of calm into the agitation being caused by the malfunction. Three or four volunteers weren't listening to each other. It is almost always polite and reserved, but disagreements occur, and what I do is considered magic by the engineers and scientists among us. I asked some questions. I diverted their attention. We started at the beginning, as we always do.

"Can't both approaches be explored?"

"What did you do last time?"

"There wasn't a last time? Ok."

"Can someone at another facility be consulted?"

"Can we reset and take turns? Listen to each other?"

A bit of this usually works and it did here, although it took the better part of my day to get there. To a consensus. Everyone agreed a consultation was warranted. And that the device, whatever it was, would be fixed in a day or two.

I was ready for sleep and returned to my dorm after a light meal at the cafeteria. I daydreamed a bit about my collection of rocks, my orbs, before the real dreams came. Rest.

Fifteen

"No bugs. No dirt. What gives?"

"You like bugs and dirt?"

"Yes, I do. I thought bugs and dirt and worms and butterflies and all the rest of it were vital to any ecosystem."

"We found a way around all that. Isn't the Courtyard beautiful? I love it there."

"Yes, it is. Stunning. My compliments to the design team, the landscapers, the engineers that do all the water features. You found some technological way around?"

"Short answer would be yes. The plant life has everything it needs to thrive."

"What would the long answer be? How do you keep this place so clean? With no one seeming to clean up?"

"We all do our part to keep this facility in ship shape. There are technologies, mechanisms involved. If I tried to explain the particulars, I would only confuse you."

"I'm guessing there is a lot going on behind the scenes."

"There is."

"I'd like a tour of the facility."

"A tour?"

"Yes, and I'd like you to be my tour guide."

"Let me get back to you on that. It may be possible for me to show you around a bit. If I can arrange it, would tomorrow work?"

"I have nothing planned."

"Okay."

"The hospital? The lab? The place I woke up in before I came here to your office. I felt like I was in London in the early 20s. The equipment. The dress. It was dusty? Yes, not as clean as here. Everything about it was old and from another time. Or was that me?"

"It wasn't you. That's funny, the 20s. I never thought of it like that. That part of our facility...it has everything it needs. We never felt the need to update it or upgrade it. So much emphasis on staying modern, don't you think? Silly, really. Call us Luddites, I guess. Does that answer your question?"

"So, this facility is old? How old?"

"You got me. That's a great question. I don't know. This place was pretty much as it is now when I started. That's several years ago now. That's all I can tell you. I don't know when things began here."

"So you had a job somewhere else. Where was that?"

"We have been asked not to talk about that. Hah! You like that one, don't you? Can I just wink or something every time I have to say that?"

"Well, I have heard that response a bit too many times. And this office. 50s? I feel like I'm at a military base around that time. I'm imagining Area 51, Roswell, early 50s."

"Hah! Yes. The decor is lovely. It was like this when I started using it. I like it. Never felt the need to change it."

"The Courtyard. Asian? Eastern? I'm reminded of Japan. Kyoto. And I can't put it into an Era, really."

"Yes, Kyoto! It does have that aesthetic. I mean, if you're going to build a nice backyard, why not? It gives the whole thing an air of serenity, I think."

"So it's just a choice. Are the designers Asian? Were Asian? Japanese?"

"Yes, a choice. Nothing to do with... there are people from everywhere here. We don't really make cultural distinctions or dwell too much on all of that. We built a courtyard and it feels like Kyoto. That's all."

"More like a park. It's a big courtyard."

"Okay, park. We call it the Courtyard."

"So there isn't a time machine at play here? We are in the present?"

"Time machine? You flatter us. Yes, we are in the present."

"I'm surprised I haven't been interrogated. I always imagined something like this would be a lot of sleep deprivation, lights in the eyes, enhanced techniques for extracting information."

"Oh no. We have all the information we need at this time. Even if we needed something, torturing you would be counterproductive. Is your stay here comfortable? Is there something you'd like to share with us?"

"Well, I'd like to begin a meaningful talk about my release. A negotiation. What I want. What you want. How we could begin to work things out."

"All I can say to that is that you will be released. Won't be long now."

Won't be long. Was that a reference to what happened on my laptop earlier? My hope is that it was my side trying to reach me. Sending me a message. My hacker friend. As I was surfing, clicking links, skimming articles, the words "won't be long" would appear, as if typed, in the middle of a sentence I was reading. Stayed for five seconds or so, then gone. Like this.

"This is an example of a sentence won't be long in an article I was reading."

A message? They are breaking me out of here and telling me to hang in. But after, Maggie says "won't be long", so not them? A coincidence? True or not, I need to believe. Got that? I'm being communicated with! I don't care that you have all the information you need. I don't care if this typing is hurting me, exposing me. Try and stop it! Use your energy on that! Won't be long! Won't be long!

Calm down. "Won't be long" appeared ten times approximately, in several posts. Funny. This has been the thing. Forever. The end is nigh! Any day now. Get ready. "Prepare ye the way of the Lord." These are the end times. Won't be long now. That video I saw looked monumental, historic, like a Revolution. With a capital R. How can I help? In here? Sit tight? Sit tight. Get ready. Prepare yourself. Be ready. Won't be long. Long. Tomorrow never comes. I'm being lulled to sleep here. So restful. No friction. No tension. It wears on you just as much as handcuffs would chafe and make your wrists raw. I fear if I shake things up, back in the hole I will go. The four hours outside. Good. Cooperating. That's good. That's good? Sit tight. Won't be long. Maybe that's part of the big Gaslight. Maybe I'll die an old man, not recognizable to myself. A withered, poor excuse of a human being, sitting on a park bench in an Asian paradise. Mumbling. "Won't be long. Won't be long."

"Only the theater is capable of creating the new society."

There it is! Voila! Dada! Would it be shaking things up too much to attempt an impromptu performance of some kind? In the park? Recruit a few folks? A dance? A song? There is none of that here. No art. No poetry. That game I watched. Kind of like art. Maybe. I'm tired of the maybes. It's all a big maybe, isn't it? Try to hold on to something. Pretend. A performance. Even when I ran through the park, I wasn't told no. I haven't been told no. Then again, I haven't done anything too radical either. I think I will. An impromptu performance. With my fellow courtiers. Come one! Come all! The greatest show on Earth!

“Now is the time.”

“Now is always the time. We don’t even recognize or use Time.”

“Ok, that’s true, but now we need to act, before...”

“Before what? Why didn’t we act before this? We have so much to give.”

“And no idea how to give it. The potential for disaster here is...we have no idea how to proceed. Haven’t even discussed it. Other than our presentation. What happens after that?”

“We begin to invite folks into our facilities. Like a grand opening of a chain of five-star hotels. Give away tickets? I don’t know. Keep it orderly. Shouldn’t be difficult. We are overthinking this.”

“We haven’t thought about it at all. The unintended consequences. The strain on our resources. Everyone, the Planet, is upset. Chaos. We’ll be overrun. Like opening the front door during a hurricane.”

“Rumors fly. Gossip. Information. Our locations will be exposed and vulnerable to attack and destruction. Bombs. Guns. Pirates. Carpetbagger robber barons.”

“Fair enough. Let’s release our prisoner...”

“Guest.”

“Hostage.”

“Slave.”

“Let’s release him and forget the whole thing.”

“Someone suggested one person. That seems to be going well. Is it? Let’s begin there.”

“Yes, it is. He’s adjusting. He likes it here. He’s thinking about a performance. A show. He’s talking about this with our volunteers. They have not been advised about this. I don’t see the harm. It’s why he’s here. Let it happen. I think it would be good. For him. For everyone.”

“The world is melting and our guest wants to do a bit of improv.”

“Even in the short time that he has been here, the situation has changed for the worse quite drastically. Does he know this? Is keeping him in the dark prudent?”

“Let him play in the sun.”

“Play in the eye of a storm.”

“If he knew that, maybe he wouldn’t want to play.”

“Maybe if we knew that...what we don’t know about much is what scares me.”

“Fear is understandable, but not helpful.”

“Let’s call it anxiety. That’s what I sense. Here. There. Everywhere.”

“Ok, aren’t we attempting to relieve that anxiety? Aren’t we going to act soon? Now is the time.”

“One person. What about that person’s friends? Should we start there? Invite his friends here.”

“The pace at which things are evolving doesn’t jibe with our process. It’s glacial. It doesn’t make sense in the context of current events. Proceed quickly. Sprint. The only reason that changes are taking place elsewhere is that quickening. We need to match that urgency. With courage. And purpose.”

“If we tried to sprint, we would fall and break our nose.”

“I don’t think anyone should influence our decision-making, such that it is. Do we make decisions? We let things happen and play with the flow. The space between. I don’t need to tell you this. Why doesn’t that practice help us here? Why are we even having this conversation? Let it happen. A few of his friends. Good idea.”

“Because we need to think past our point of coming out. Our presentation. Who is doing that, by the way.”

“I will. I have been thinking about it. Writing a script. Should our guest be involved? Would he want to be?”

“I think so, but I would say it’s too early for that.”

“Too early. Too late. Great.”

“Doesn’t he need to be the first contact? Wasn’t that the point of taking him? To be a witness? A way to build trust? Without that, it would be too much of a shock. Too much could go wrong.”

“It would be wrong to place undue demands on him at this time. I think we can proceed and involve him later.”

“Ok. You show a film. An overview. You say a few kind words. What happens after that?”

“I like the friends idea. This doesn’t have to happen overnight. We could announce it globally and initiate it locally and slowly. It took generations to get to the formative stage we are at now. The roll-out, the implementation, will take generations as well.”

“I’m not sure how that works. Maybe a big splashy announcement is not required.”

“Ok. How would it work without that?”

“You invite a few people at a time. At first. Keep it under wraps. See how that goes. I wish we were more ready for all this.”

“Ready. We’re never ready for anything. We play with that. We celebrate that. Now we are like field generals making preparations for an ambush, and it sounds silly. Dropping gifts. Dropping bombs. Same thing. Let’s talk about repercussions. Aftershocks. The sick and wounded. The disenfranchised.”

“Ok. You start. We’re listening.”

“The end game. Anyone who wants to having the opportunity to live as we do. Anyone includes many cultures, traditions, faiths, families, and tribes. We think that for it to work, they will need to let go, to shed, all that. Good luck. That is my main problem with all this. The hubris that volunteers of every stripe will neatly line up and accept our ways and practices, no questions asked. That’s not gonna happen. Not tomorrow. Not next year. Not ever.”

“What will emerge will have all that. It will be different, but it will be the same. We can’t know what shape it will take. And that shouldn’t stop us from a Beginning. Stop us from trusting our instincts. A world where everyone is provided for. Why the protests? The conflict? It’s for that. An abundance can cure a myriad of ills.”

“And cause greed and envy. Violence and power struggles. Lethargy and selfishness.”

“Crime doesn’t exist here. Self-interest. The only thing that would be created, if allowed to, would be a desire to contribute.”

“A desire to control.”

“A lack of desire. A detachment. We see that. We live that. Our experience informs our faith.”

“Your faith lacks a myriad of factors and intangible mysteries that you are hopelessly ignorant of. You begin again with no grasp of the future and you dance from moment to moment to moment. Haplessly. I do the same. We all do. It makes us ill-equipped and unprepared for this moment. This initiative. I think we should send our guest on his way, and continue our practice. Or not. Practice something else. Something that will get us to a more helpful stance. In that way, we can maybe share our gifts with those who might be prepared to accept them. And maybe we could accept something in exchange. Maybe that gift would be a clearer way forward, a healthier relationship with the future.”

“This talk will lead to nothing more than another talk. While the world undulates around us. Possibly enveloping us. I’m frustrated by this.”

“A gift. An exchange. That’s all. One thing we are good at is keeping things simple. And clear. This feels muddy. Cloudy.”

“We are bad at administering. Governance. We need a bureaucracy. Committees. Yesterday. Only way forward.”

“A lack of governance is one of the main tenets we want to give away, so I’m not following you.”

“How does one set an example? Without formality, you are formless. You want to play a game. A game without rules is no game at all.”

“Yes, a game. Yes, rules. But I see no need to emphasize that. We never have. We thrive. Our pleasure is not ecstatic, but our contentment is static. Grounded. Do we now need to utter those things that are for the most unspoken?”

“Well. yes. One needs to know the rules. Our relations will seem telepathic. We need to fight against that. Garner skills and modes of communication. That can be broadly applied in a wide variety of ways. Put that on the long list of crucial, imperative implementations.”

“There’s a gap, a crevice, a gorge, and we don’t know the first thing about building a bridge over it.”

“Maybe our guest can help. Wasn’t that discussed? I ask again. Why did we take this gentleman from his home?”

“To help us with that, yes. And he already is. I can see a way forward with his help.”

“I see a frightened boy in a strange land; his only thought - pretending.”

“It’s all pretend.”

“Starvation, disease, war, and hatred. Not pretend.”

“We can eliminate that. Reduce it. Minimize it. Make it a fading memory. A more abundant and just world is possible. Isn’t it?”

“We should work towards that. We are capable. Incrementally. Micro and Macro.”

“So we have some vague consensus about that. That in itself doesn’t get us anywhere.”

“It’s not vague. Our capabilities. Our technology. Our day-to-day existence. More than that. Our thriving way of life. If it is not to be shared, then what? Hoarded?”

“Protected.”

“Nurtured.”

“Developed.”

“Secured.”

“Scaled up.”

“Available.”

“Opportunity.”

“Growth.”

“Humankind. Human kindness.”

“Acts of kindness.”

“Beauty.”

“A handshake.”

“A salute.”

“A celebration.”

“A journey.”

“A journey.”

“Let’s go.”

I’m surprised I was able to transcribe this talk as accurately as I just did. Almost verbatim, I would say, having looked over it again. It felt like a breakthrough. Yes, ignorant. Ill-equipped. But at the same time resolute. Events out of our purview leading us to action. I’m gonna focus on our friend. Our guest becoming a friend. Let him put on his show. Why not? I will inform our volunteers that he is to be accommodated. I trust others will find focus. My friends. Coming together in a spirit of goodwill and common cause. I will not occupy my every waking thought with the task, tasks, ahead. I will write poetry. I will take pleasure in my playful activity, trusting that is as important as our grand exposition will be. Is our guest, our friend, teaching us something? His perspective? His resolve, his poise, his composure? His desire to play despite his circumstance, our circumstance, the world’s circumstance? I think he is. I think he will lead us somewhere. Where we need to go. If we let him. We didn’t know what would happen. We didn’t need to know. What has happened is good. Positive. I can see him and I, his and ours, finding a place. In the Sun. To play.

Sixteen

Two things came to light today. I'm not sure what to believe. I want to maintain a healthy level of skepticism. I want to maintain a healthy level of optimism. How to do that on such shaky ground? How can I move forward in this quicksand of doubt? And mistrust? What's real? Trust your instincts. Get out of your own way and believe what your gut is telling you.

First thing. I had another chat with Maggie. I asked her if they were monitoring my laptop. I don't know why I didn't think of this earlier. Maybe I had. Thinking of a sly way to broach the subject. How to not make too big a deal out of it. How to hide my suspicions that my friends were getting through. The video clip. And "Won't be long." I tried to be as nonchalant as possible and asked as lightly and casually as I could. She answered right away without a hint of deception or falsehood. No, they weren't monitoring my laptop. Once I stopped my fast, they stopped monitoring it. They felt I needed a place to go privately and thought the laptop was a good solution for that. Yes, certain encryptions and throttles were in place, but no, it was not being watched or recorded. Even the entries I had made that had disappeared were saved. I shrugged and changed the subject, hoping to conceal my excitement. Was it true? Yes, there is a secret or secrets I'm not privy to, and many of my questions have remained unanswered. There is an evasiveness that's hard to explain, hard to quantify. But when my questions are answered simply and straightforwardly, I sense a truthfulness and forthcoming attitude that inwardly I trust. Maggie can be elusive and mysterious, but there's also a matter-of-fact sincerity that comes through. A charming, pleasant earnestness to be envied. If they were reading my posts and tracking my searches, wouldn't they have quickly confiscated this machine? No one here seems the least bit threatened by me, which doesn't square with the fact that they unceremoniously snatched me from my home. And put me in solitary. The dichotomy between my incarceration and my relative freedom here is puzzling on the molecular level. Particle or wave? The inherent duality that is omnipresent. Accentuated here. Enough. More about this later, because I feel that this is at the heart of my mission, which still is, thankfully, getting out of here and back to the work we are doing.

Second thing. I'm not sure if it has been there the whole time or not. My desktop background. Plain. Blank. An abstract mix of gray shapes, like soft clouds or murky water. Nothing special. When I closed a window and paused for a moment this morning to rub my eyes, I saw it. Faint. Crooked. Messy. But letters. From left to right. Words. Words? "Typing To Us" If I stare at it, it slowly glows, growing smaller and larger, just an iota. An animation sped up in my mind, each letter in turn glowing, pulsing. Typing to us. I have to believe this is a message from my friends. That they are reading this. Now. In real time. Why not? I do have a search engine. Bits are coming in from elsewhere. The right hack could make this happen undetected. My friends are more than capable of this. It has to be. Typing to us. The video. "Won't be long." "Typing to us." Yes. This is so. I am not alone. I am being watched. But not by Maggie. Not them. Us.

So this and Maggie's response to my surveillance inquiry leave me encouraged. Thrilled. Emboldened.

"Meaning has to be created, made up. Out of what? Out of anything."

Not sure where I got that. Stuck with me. Sounds like Dada logic. Or non-logic. Yeah, probably. Read a lot about all that. Why think of that now? Because the meaning I need now rests on a house of cards. The foundation of my every thought is wobbly and rickety and continuously crumbling, if it is there at all. Make it up. Pretend. Go with it. I'm a free prisoner. I'm a dream that loves its dreamer. I'm a lone soul in Solidarity. I am nothing. In touch with all things. Because I say so. Because I created that. These words are a letter. A message. A call. A connection. Contact with mine? I'm doing it all the time. Working for change. By default. Default position. My center. My action. My spirit. Not separate. Even here. Not alone. Not long now. Won't be long. Not long. Us.

At the cafeteria I tried to bring up the subject of theater and performance, in hopes of sparking interest in making a show, a play, a dance, anything. Did I see a spark of recognition, even for a moment, from anyone? Not really. Hard to explain the detachment and disengaged aura that permeates all the social aspects of this place, these people. The chat can be non sequitur and cryptic, almost another language. If I dig, if I analyze this, I hit a wall. Sometimes the subject of a conversation changes and I only become aware of it after the fact. Weren't we talking about theater? Wasn't I trying to talk about that? How can these folks be so open and closed simultaneously? And not the least bit bothered by it. There is personality here, yet a homogenous acceptance and ease that is off-putting. Maybe I'm jealous. These people wouldn't have that word in their vocabulary, or in their hearts. No way. Pleasantville. A free floating kindness. Not clingy. Things don't cling here. No dust clinging to the floor. No worm clinging to the branch. No desire clinging to the lover. Is it driving me crazy because they are in a place I unconsciously wish for? Their way of being? How much baggage would I have to shed? Wax on. Wax off. Hah! Never get there. If it wasn't so easy, I would stop trying to connect. But it is easy. Everything is easy here. Everything flows. Like water. Or music. I asked if there were other musicians here other than the one I heard earlier. A few. Do they ever play together as a group? I said we might need that for our performance. They thought so, but couldn't remember when that happened last. Never anything at a set time. Or rehearsed or with an audience. Yes, a performance where people not performing gather to listen or watch performers. Giggles. Not giggles. Amusement. Like I'm some exotic bird making some exotic sound. No birds. No bugs. No dirt. That fact doesn't seem to bother anyone here. I need to be diligent. Alert to anything that cracks this mood. This detached way of being. I have a long way to go before I can put up a show. I'll keep working at it.

Sometimes this place rubs off on me. In a good way. I can stroll the courtyard unburdened, relaxed, and at relative peace with my frustrations and conundrums. This thing I feel, have felt, most of my life; an infused protection, or wisdom, a metaphysical blanket, a filmy layer of light, of lightness, a glow, an aura, the DNA of a thousand lifetimes, it's somehow more at the surface here. Nothing gets in the way here, and loss and pain and suffering and confusion can be somehow, at least temporarily, absent. Like an aware, alert state of meditation. Transcendent, but not profound. Not a balance between light and dark. Just in the light. Not blinding. Not rapturous. Just strolling. In the park. Nice.

I guess it's a practice I've adopted. To let go and feel a bit of pleasure. Joy. The benefits of a morning constitutional. A brisk walk through the park. I imagine Charles Dickens taking one of his famous daily jaunts about London, emptying his mind of the fictions and tales of the day. Like that. That's what I was doing when I saw it.

A ladder. Reaching the top of the courtyard wall. Has it been here the whole time? Hidden in the vines. Maybe I'm just seeing it now? Nothing ever changes here, so probably. Wooden. Fairly sturdy at first glance. I took a real good look at it, up close, for a while.

Of course, other passersby were unfazed. Ignoring me. And the ladder. A ladder to the top of the wall. Of course there is a ladder to the top of the wall. Have I mentioned escaping? Breaking out? To Maggie or anyone else? If I had, I probably got back some off-handed remark about how lovely it is to live here. Can I express how far away thoughts of escape, of any kind, internal or external, are here? Not the slightest hint. Why escape paradise? Go where? I'm here. Now. Escape?

I grabbed a wrung waist high and pulled. Ok. What did I write earlier? One hundred feet? Ten stories. Not a fun climb. Would I feel secure all the way up? The rungs were flat and a good width and depth. A few feet wide. A foot-length deep? Yeah. I stood under the ladder looking up for ten minutes or so, building up the nerve to give it a go. From what I could tell, the ladder was held in place by wires into the wall all the way up. The whole thing was covered in vines, but the path, the rungs, seemed clear and navigable. I put my right foot on the first rung and took a few deep breaths. Just then I could hear people behind me walking by on the footpath that is closely parallel and around the entire perimeter of the courtyard. They didn't address me or get my attention, but repeated this as they went by, snickering. Not snickering. Laughing. Laughing? The most robust laugh to date. And that is not saying much. Like an inside joke at an office water cooler.

"Not much to see up there."

"All will be revealed!"

"Not much to see up there."

"All will be revealed!"

Over and over as long as I could hear them. They just kept walking and repeating that even after I turned around and tried to get their attention. I couldn't get them to stop or answer me, even after raising my voice quite a bit.

"Not much to see up there."

"All will be revealed!"

"Not much to see up there."

"All will be revealed!"

Here. Now. Right before I discovered this. About to do this. An amusing cryptic mantra, more intriguing than most anything else I've heard here. A tacit permission to give it a go. A warning to not get my hopes up. What gives? Making fun of trying to find something. Of seeking. A blasé retort to all things risky and beguiling. Blasé. Not blasé. That infers a boredom. Or lack of interest. Neutral? I'll get there. This attitude, this mood. This pair, however. Playing games. Teasing. A bit. A skit. Beckett. Pinter. Non-existent here. Wait! Remember those faces! Go after them! Not now. But this may be a crack. Maybe two actors auditioning. For my performance.

Excelsior! Hah! That's what I'll say. At the top. To no one. That's what I'll shout. To hear the echo. Take it easy. One rung at a time. Slowly. Safely. Anybody care if I'm doing this? Of course not. The time I ran caused a bit of a stir, but

nothing really. An extra glance or two. No hall monitor here. No uniforms. No guards. No maintenance. No crew. No assistants. No directors. No guides. No staff.

Climb.

The first thirty feet of the ladder was nicely angled. Okay. After that it hugged the wall, and I entered a semi circular iron tubed cage around the ladder, like a safety feature you might see at a high rise construction site. Good. I felt good. Secure. Guy-wires supporting the ladder every few feet. Wait. Did I see this tube from the ground? I don't think so. Did it just appear now? Like magic? No. Maybe? For another time. Just climb, I thought. Slowly. Safely. One rung at a time. That's what I was thinking. The cage around me, the ladder, was quite manageable and I was doing well. Steady progress. Not looking down. Not looking up. Climbing. A ladder. To the top of the wall.

The ladder reached about six feet above the wall. And the cage completely surrounded this section. Of all the places to see my first padlock. Old. Rusty. On a part of the cage that looked like it would swing open. In front of me. An exit. Locked. This whole thing was like a fire escape or safety ladder you might see on the side of any apartment building. I wasn't going any further. In a wrought iron capsule at the top of a hundred foot ladder. I quickly gave up on the idea that I might open the lock or the door or squeeze my way out or anything like that.

The wall was thick. I could barely see the edge because of fog. Fog? A mist. Low-lying clouds? Thirty feet thick? At least that. The vines were here too, on the top of the wall, draping over the edge on both sides, as far as I could tell. Bad visibility. "Not much to see up there." Well? Right. Not much to see up here. But some visibility. A mountain range? Cliffs? A wooded area? Treetops? It was colder here. Not by a lot, but noticeably cooler. Was I hours away from home? My memory of the abduction. A few hours' drive? Not sure. Could this place be in the general vicinity of my home? My city? Yes. I think so.

I'm not sure how long I stayed at the top of the ladder. Not much to see. Yes. But I was also teased that all would be revealed. I thought about that. Concentrated on that as hard as I could while looking around. Revealed? Metaphor. Symbolism. Parable. Is this what I'm missing in the translation? Is All the All inside my mind? Being here, in this cage, on this wall, is the revelation? Will the fog clear? Can I make it clear? Metaphorically? If I think the right thoughts, will the actual fog clear? Can I get into a state where I can "see" through the fog. Here? Down in the park? In my room? All will be revealed. There is so much that isn't revealed. To my beginner's mind, anyway. I resolved to make the climb again sometime. Maybe on another ladder? Stay sharp. Stay alert. Be open to anything. These are things I told myself as I climbed back down the ladder.

Crazy thing. I got all the way down, about ten feet to go, then I slipped and fell. To the ground. Hit hard. Twisted my ankle. Pretty bad. I sat on the ground for a few minutes, rubbing my leg, checking for more damage other than my smarting ankle. Ouch. Stupid! Did I slip? Did the rung give way? I looked up at the ladder. When I turned around, a person approached and asked if I was okay. I told them I wasn't, and that I wasn't sure if I could walk. They gave me a quick nod and walked away. Just a nod. What? "Wait here, please." "I'll be right back." Something like that would have been nice. I tried to get on my feet but no, even limping would be a pain, so I sat back down. They did come back after a few minutes, thankfully, with another person, and they assisted me, held me up on either side as I painfully limped all the way to the hospital, or clinic, or lab, or whatever it was. Yup. Time Machine. 20s. London hospital shortly after the Great War. Just like I remembered it.

“Thanks for seeing me today.”

“Did I have a choice?”

“Yes, you did. You do. Why must you be like this?”

“Like what?”

“Like that. Thanks for seeing me today.”

“You’re welcome. Better?”

“Not much. I need a favor.”

“Here we go.”

“Stop.”

“We’ve known each other a long time, Maggie. May I call you Maggie? And when I hear that you need a favor, I cringe.”

“Sam, may I call you Sam? Must we address each other by name? You shouldn’t cringe. You should be alight with bubbling anticipation, eager to please in any way you can.”

“Please. Let me guess. You want me to make friends with your hostage.”

“Guest.”

“Prisoner.”

“Honored guest. The person who is gonna see us through this mess.”

“Gaslit sycophant...mess is right.”

“May I fill you in on where we are at and how we think you may be able to help?”

“Can I say no?”

“No, you can’t. Our guest is settling in nicely. Disoriented as anyone would be, but he’s strong, healthy, and curious. He likes it here. He’s quickly filling in the blanks, connecting the dots, despite our obfuscation and confusing cues, our awkward introduction. He’s getting to know us and we are getting to know him. Our hope is that he will eventually be an informed witness to what we have built, and that he will be able to help introduce us to the world. That he will help us give it all away. Opportunity, for everyone. We think now is the time that he should meet you. We feel you would best be able to...our tech...no one has a better handle on all that than you do. Show him some things. Answer some questions. Yes, make friends. Give him something to do. Rewarding activities. Satisfying work. Make him feel like he’s contributing. We thought he might enjoy playing with our insects.”

“An apprentice in my shop? Hand holding? A few meals?”

“Yes, something like that.”

“My shadow for the better part of my days ahead?”

“Well, no, but..”

“Absolutely not. Not qualified. Not interested. I’m surprised you are coming to me with this.”

“Are you? Surprised? That’s a first.”

“Shall I tell you again? My major reservations? About us? How we do Us? Everything wrong with this pace and everything wrong about how we run it? How stupid it was to take him like that? To take him at all?”

“We value your perspective. He will, too. The very reason we think now is the time that you meet him.”

“You value my perspective. No, you don’t. You barely pay attention to me most of the time. I wasn’t even told about him till after the fact, the fact being the kidnapping. The incarceration. The psychological torture. I can’t imagine. And now, you want my help. Because you don’t have any idea what to do next. I wouldn’t know the first thing to say. Or the last. I don’t know how to make friends. Are we friends, Maggie? If we are, then you are pretty much it. And I’m good with that. Many other choices. Many happy volunteers with lots of know-how and friendly banter. Please, Maggie. Make another choice.”

“We talked about it. You are who he needs to meet. You’d be good together. You are the breath of fresh air he needs. You have a curmudgeonly charm that’s irresistible.”

“Oh, do I?”

“We’d like to show him the Insectarium. We’d like you to be there. Introduce you. Is there something he could do? Some simple tasks he could return to if and when he wants to do that?”

“There’s always something to do. It will overwhelm him. He won’t like it.”

“I’m not so sure. I think he’ll be amazed. Intrigued. It’s the most engaging space we have. Why do you spend so much time there?”

“Because I’m needed there. Because I find inspiration there. It fuels my imagination. I’m embarrassing myself right now. I guess you bring it out in me. It’s a bad idea, exposing our facilities. To even one person, much less thousands. Is that your plan? Throngs of tired and poor neatly lined up outside our gates?”

“We don’t have a plan. I thought you told me that. Other than introducing our guest to you. Oh, and we’re making a movie.”

“I heard about that. Really bad plan. I’m the wrong girl and the movie is, well, a bad idea.”

“How so?”

“You know how much I love this. I haven’t said this much about anything since I don’t know, since last time we spoke?”

“We had a great time last time. We didn’t do this. We had lunch. We sat in the courtyard and teased the game players. We barely spoke.”

“I forgot about that. That was fun. I don’t like this. Not now. I don’t want to debate you. You know how I feel about things. You can guess what I’m going to say. You know what I’m going to say. Can we leave it at that? Can you just leave me be? Please. Find somebody else.”

“No, I can’t. Just say hello. Show him the bugs. Let him play. If it becomes problematic in any way, it will stop.”

“Just say hello.”

“I think you will like him.”

“I don’t like anybody. I don’t even like you.”

“But you will do this for me because I’m asking you to.”

“I will do this for you because you are asking me to.”

“Thank you.”

“Goodbye?”

“Goodbye.”

Seventeen

"Hey, thanks for taking a look at my ankle."

"You're welcome. Not bad. Sprained. It's gonna hurt for a few days. Stay off it as much as you can. There's a few things we can do. Ointments. You'll be wearing a tight bandage. It will speed up the healing process. You'll be surprised how quick."

"It's already feeling much better. What did you do?"

"Nothing much, but we've learned a lot, especially about simple injuries like this. You'll be good as new in a blink!"

"Great. This place. Is it a hospital? Clinic? Laboratory? Everything here seems old. Like the 1920s or something. Like I went back in time. Did I? Am I in the past? Now?"

"That's funny. The 20s? I never thought about it like that, but I can see where you would think that. No. No time machine. Present day."

"My room is so futuristic. The cafeteria. The Courtyard. Modern. There is some amazing technology at work in this place. Beyond what I'm familiar with. Yet here it is so old school. Positively ancient!"

"Hah. Not really. We have everything we need here. It works. Never felt the need to upgrade. Our know-how is up to date, rest assured."

"So, is this a lab as well as a clinic?"

"Yes, it is. All kinds of things go on here. Not just medical stuff. Science stuff. We support this facility in many ways. Hey, Maggie says you like bugs?"

"Well, I just noticed there were none. I haven't seen any. I was just curious about that."

"There's something I'd like to show you."

I had a bit of pain, and a small limp, but yes, the treatment I just received....how? I just fell ten feet and badly sprained my ankle, yet I'm feeling pretty good, better by the minute. Old school lab with Sci-Fi know how. Nothing adds up. But they do have everything they need here. Everything they need. Must be nice.

I was escorted down a few hallways and into a small foyer. A receiving area. A few folks were coming in and out of some large double doors. I was still in the 20s.

"You are in for a treat. It's gonna be a bit noisy. And it might throw you a bit. Just relax. Not dangerous. We do like to wear safety glasses here. Here you go."

In for a treat. Overwhelming is more like it. We entered a large, gymnasium sized space. Noisy. Active. Glass aquariums. Floor to ceiling. Everywhere. Tubes. Wires. Lamps. Glowing cathodes. Row after row of tables stacked with this stuff. The whole scene had a light green, organic hue to it. And the smell. Flowery? Earthy? It was a bit too much to take in at first. What was I looking at? I felt in the way of everyone running around with their clipboards and pencils. Once I got my bearings, I realized I was inside an Insectarium. Magnificent. That's the sound I hear. Every tank was buzzing and crawling with bugs of every variety. Netted enclosures filled with moths and butterflies. Worms and slugs. Creepy crawlies of every description. Tubes and conveyor belts of soil going everywhere. Rube Goldberg would be proud. The room felt like one big, buzzing, throbbing contraption. Something different on every table. The complexity of this machine, this menagerie, was beyond comprehension. And it had more energy and life than anything else here. There is a

calm, sated, complacent ease and serenity to this facility. Boring. Bland, some might say. No excitement. Nothing to write home about. This insectarium was the opposite of all that, and a welcome departure from that oasis. I'm writing home now. My friends, you would not believe this. So much! So many! Thesaurus. Synonyms for beautiful. Dazzling. Marvelous. Stunning. Yes, I'm stunned. You would be, too.

I was allowed to tour the room for an hour or more. My questions were answered more than satisfactorily. Yes, bugs were important. To any system. The soil used for the plant life in the Courtyard. Treated here first. The bugs do all the things that they need to do to the soil here in this enclosed, controlled environment. Just an aesthetic choice, I was told. The designers wanted a cleaner, purer, quieter ambiance to the Courtyard. A bit of a trick, but in many ways easier and more efficient to do it this way. So with a bunch of tech from what looks like the 20s, they're pulling off a logistical, ecological miracle beyond what's possible today. At least that's my take on it; put it on the baffling list. When I throw in words like "magic" and "surreal" into my questions, I get a snicker, a giggle, a shy, demure response that no, it's not magic. Not the future. Not anything that isn't common knowledge. Smoke and mirrors. My lack of understanding. My ignorance. Stumbling around in the dark here. When I try to put two and two together, I strike out. Dumbfounded. Discouraged. Brain-tired. Like staring at a chalkboard with a long equation covering it and the brain fog that sets in. Anyway, an amazing place, the Insectarium. That's what they call it. That's what I thought as well. At least I got that.

I asked if I could come back. I asked if there was work I could do here, if I could help. They said yes right away. I've come a long way from being in solitary confinement on a hunger strike. Would I still be in solitary if I hadn't fasted? Something tells me no. Feels like I have carte blanche here. I stay out past four hours and no one cares. Why the solitary in the beginning?

Before my tour ended, they introduced me to the most interesting person I have met here. By a mile. Something else there. I was told I would be working with her whenever I chose to come back. They? Them? No. She. Most certainly female, but there is a non-binary thread that runs through every soul here. Maggie is a bit more feminine. Some of my other acquaintances are a bit more male, but my new lab partner... right down the middle.

An easy social manner. Conversational. Warm. Everyone here. But not her. Uniquely shy. Brilliant. Awkward. Savant. Closed. Innocent. Wise. Fragile, yet impenetrable. All these things. On the autism spectrum, that's what anyone would say if they met her. That doesn't do it for me. Too easy. We're all on some spectrum, so what? Not like anyone else here. I feel lucky to be paired with her. Was this on purpose? I'm loosely monitored as far as I can tell, and I'm a prisoner. Maybe they have no idea about her. Do they keep tabs on everyone? Vetting? If I could explain how this place seems to run itself, no one driving the bus, I would. This is the person. This is the key. I like her a lot. I hope we can be partners. Here. With the bugs. And the worms. And the butterflies.

Second video today. Same as the first. Quarter screen pop-up window. Ten seconds? Grainy. Hard to make out. Quick cuts. Talks? A summit? Boardrooms? The U. N.? Press conference? Microphones. Video screen backdrops. Official. Power. Did I recognize anyone? Too grainy. The usual suspects? Probably? Happening now? I hope so. Did what I saw in the first video lead to this? It takes a large ship miles to stop. The wheels of progress turn slowly. Generationally. This was all too fast. The thought that mass protests have now led to concrete, high-level negotiations doesn't compute.

Maybe my perception of time is off. Tipping points. Avalanches. Meteors wiping out everything instantaneously. These things happen. Could it be? My friends, can you give me more information somehow? Are you already doing that? And I'm not seeing it? Are our people at the table? Is everyone ok? Has anyone died? War. Is war happening? Are these countries? Or industries? Or corporations? How can I help? Are you working on getting me out of here? I'm fine. Better than fine. I'm encouraged by all these developments, inside and out. Inside here. Out there. In me. In you. The minimum and the maximum. The smile I got from my new lab partner. The U. N. frantically working for a solution to all the problems. All this, my spirit, our world, seems to be on an uptick.

I'm still putting "Utopia" into the search engine regularly.

"To make the world work for 100% of humanity in the shortest possible time through spontaneous cooperation without ecological offense or the disadvantage of anyone."

Buckminster Fuller. Are there any Buckyballs or geodesic domes here? Make a note. Ask my new partner about Fuller. 100%. Everyone. Cooperation. Why not? The Bucky ball is perfect. Scale that out. It shouldn't be a question of scale. Large families thrive and provide for themselves. Every need. Every day. Just roll up your sleeves and make it happen for everyone. Lose the greed. Lose the envy. Lose the fear. Let go of the selfish, hot passions of desire and avarice. Redirect that energy towards the common good. Won't be long. I saw that phrase again a few times in the middle of sentences, as if being typed. Thank you. I see it. In the meantime, I will try to figure this place out. I will endeavor to secure my release. I will come home and make harmony with you.

My friends, I am doing well. I'm surprised how well. There's an Aether here that warms me. An Aether, no. The Aether. The unseen light of the universe. The infinity of strings and connections that loosely binds and collects and infuses and directs. It's more pronounced here. Beyond my faith. It's just here. It makes me feel centered and puts at bay my fears and anxieties.

Is this place a secret? Are there technologies at work here beyond what is widely known? If I didn't know any better, I would say I was on another plane, in another time or dimension. As real as it is, sometimes I feel like I am on a movie set, with a paper moon and a cardboard sky. Not in the world I know. Science fiction. But at the same time, things seem grounded. It seems as natural as a sunrise. Or a tree. Can the yin and yang...search...

"Yin and yang is a Chinese philosophical concept that describes opposite but interconnected forces."

Can the yin and yang be combined here? The interconnection far outweighing the opposites? Is there less of a distinction between what is real and unreal? Ok, I'm out there, but I hope you know what I'm trying to express. It's ok. I'm not afraid. I can stay here. And wait. I can thrive here. An autonomous, free-spirited abductee with a boundless imagination and sense of wonder and curiosity. How can that be? How does this place exist? This place. On the Earth. This real facility. And the new place in my heart. Who, what, where, when, and why. Ours is not to wonder why; ours is but to do or die. Hah! Nobody here is dying. Or wondering. Just doing. But I need the wondering. It's a place they can't touch. If I feel that slipping away, maybe it already is, then I'm in trouble.

“Well, we screened our film. Said hello to the world.”

“I would say it went very well. I would also say that it will take a while for it to sink in. Who and what we are and what we have to offer.”

“Are we safe? Are our locations known? A breach, a siege, an attack. These are possibilities. Strong ones, I would argue.”

“We didn’t reveal our locations. We didn’t discuss next steps. Said hello. That’s about all we did.”

“Let that sink in before any action is taken? That’s the plan?”

“We don’t have a plan.”

“Yes, we do. We said hello. Our guest is thriving. Let’s talk about what’s next.”

“Someone mentioned our guest’s friends. Let’s invite about thirty or forty of them here, to this facility. See how that goes.”

“Favoritism. You have no idea how people will react to all this. Organizations. Factions. Interests. All with many different agendas and motives. If one militaristic group thinks they will be advantaged by occupying us, taking us over...we have no defense.”

“How do we keep our locations secret and invite large numbers of citizens to participate, at the same time?”

“Excellent question.”

“I think we should do everything we can to keep our locations secret for now.”

“Travel. Even simple communications between facilities. We don’t do that. Each spot is completely independent and insulated. Isolated. I think that is one major thing that makes it work. Helps us thrive. Once our guests decide to join us, that will be that. No back and forth. They don’t even need to know where they are. I think that could be accomplished. Without that in place, violence and occupations are inevitable.”

“Other than shock, what was the reaction to our movie? Our presentation? Did everyone seem anxious for information? Anxious to join us? Live with us?”

“Yes. We have several formal proposals to look over. We have many questions that need to be answered promptly. We do need to figure this out, sooner than later.”

“We should have had it figured out before we started. We are in way over our heads without a clue how to proceed. And it’s too late to turn back now.”

“Well said. I’m very concerned about this. We all should be.”

“We are. We should be open to suggestions. Not just from inside, but from outside as well.”

“Who will be taking a look at these proposals? How will the planet communicate with us moving forward? Do we have protocols in place?”

“ We are not taking calls, if that’s what you mean. We have secure communication protocols in place. Do we? Somebody chime in here, please.”

“There is a casual air to these proceedings that I find inappropriate.”

“These aren’t proceedings.”

“We don’t need to do anything. We don’t owe anyone. We have nothing to prove. We shouldn’t feel any obligation to fix, or responsibility for, what is transpiring outside our walls.”

“We are already doing something. What’s next is the question we need to be asking.”

“Has anybody been thinking about what’s next? Now would be a good time to say something.”

“Yes. We are doing it. The lines of communication are now open. Our guest needs to be involved at some point. Will he help? Is he ready to help?”

“More than ready. I can speak to him about all this right away.”

“What would you say? Request?”

“That he be a witness. Speak to the benefits of what we have. And our willingness to share it with the world. An ambassador.”

“That sounds right. I fear we are making this more complicated than it needs to be. Everything is in place. We just need to follow through. It doesn’t have to happen quickly. We should move ahead at a pace of our liking, and not be swayed by...anything or anyone. It’s our gift. Let’s share it as we see fit, in our own way.”

“Our way. That’s listening to one another. Being open to suggestions. Let’s keep talking, and let’s do it more often. Every day if we feel the need.”

“I think we should have larger meetings. Get more of us involved. And they should be at a set time. Daily.”

“We’ll do that. Tomorrow then?”

“Tomorrow.”

Eighteen

I asked Maggie if they would have let me out of solitary if I hadn't fasted. Would I still be in there now otherwise?

I got the feeling she was waiting for this question. She paused. Her response was sincere, yet formal. Almost scripted. I believed her. She was regretful, apologetic, and emotional.

"We are very sorry for how this all began for you. Your stay here. The way you were taken. That you felt the need to fast. Our silence. The whole thing. It was wrong. It should have been handled completely differently. It could have been handled completely differently. I fear our explanations, our reasons for why it happened that way, would be woefully inadequate. We see now that a different approach was warranted. I can't expound on this. I can't go into the whys and wherefores. I can't go into what went into our decision making at the time. I can only offer our deepest regrets and apologies. And offer that we will try to make your stay here moving forward as pleasant and comfortable and rewarding as possible. To answer your question, no, you would not have stayed in solitary if you continued to eat. At some point, you would have been given access to the courtyard and the cafeteria and everywhere else."

I thanked her. I thanked her for showing me the Insectarium. For giving me a job. For partnering me with such an interesting, delightful character.

I had so many questions. And she was so open and forthcoming about many of them, yet so closed and terse about as many others. I would keep asking questions. For now, I felt this apology was sufficient, and heartfelt, and more than I could ask for. I wasn't asking for an apology, but I got one. A big one. There you go.

I walked around the park and asked if anyone would like to participate in an impromptu performance. If we could gather and play. Pretend. A song. A dance. A skit. Those who did not want to be on stage could be our audience. I said I thought it would be fun. No luck. Deer in the headlights. The responses I got were muted, demure, and noncommittal. How would I jumpstart this thing? Why was I even trying? Art. Games. Music. It's here, but it's not. My perspective and point of reference were off. Way off. How do I? Yes, a person playing a lyre under a tree for their own amusement. But a band? No. A complex game of words and gestures that I couldn't begin to fathom? Yes. But a contest? A sport? Large groups doing anything together? No. The rock gardens were works of art at a high level. But no sculpture. The topiary. Abstract. The fountains and water features were hypnotizing. Transcendent. But were they the expression of one artist? Was anything here Art? No. How could I get across the pleasures of standing up as an individual and expressing oneself. Of communicating as a pretense. The kick of showing off. Flaunting one's gifts. That doesn't exist here. Not even as a thought.

I put all that aside for a moment and looked for a place to have my show. A place where people could sit and watch. A stage. Nothing like a stage here. One of the gazebos? Maybe. I spotted a small knoll with a gazebo at the bottom. Enough room for a decent crowd and a small company of performers. Not great, but...there were already a few people seated on the grass, not doing much.

Why the incessant need to be doing something all the time? These folks have that licked. They just don't feel the need. They can sit for long periods in silence and be perfectly content. With others. Without. No matter. Not bored. That

word doesn't work here. Disinterest. Detachment. In a way, that's gently freeing. These people don't need a show. Is that it?

I made my way to the front edge of the gazebo and turned around to face my small, unsuspecting audience. I raised my voice and recited a few lines of Shakespeare. I poorly delivered a tired old joke. I sang a bit. Scatted. Crickets. I'm not sure they even turned their heads. I approached them and asked if one of them would like to give it a try. If there was something they might want to share. They asked me what it was they should try exactly. I nervously rambled a bit about open mic nights, poetry circles, improv, the magic of the theater. They politely declined, like school children at a dance, afraid to find a partner. At that point I was really second guessing myself, about to pack it in for the day, maybe head to see the bugs, when I saw them walking past. The two at the ladder. "Not much to see up there." "All will be revealed!" That's it! The only exclamation I've heard here. The only joke? Were they joking? No matter. I asked for a moment of their time. I explained to them what I was trying to do and that their participation would not only be fun but effortless. Nothing really.

I had them stand at either end of the gazebo, stage left and right, facing our audience of three. Four? I told them what they would do and to wait for my cue. I made an announcement as loud as I could, repeatedly, for a few minutes.

"Come one! Come all! The show is about to commence!"

To my amazement, I attracted a dozen more park dwellers. I think they were just being polite. There's a courtesy, a kindness, a politeness that is a large part of my every interaction here. To a fault, I would argue. They knew me. Everyone recognized me and I didn't know a soul. I was at a disadvantage, though I was getting used to it. Maybe they were told to humor me. I don't know.

On my cue my actors repeated their lines alternately, much like they did when they passed the ladder.

"Not much to see up there."

"All will be revealed!"

I had to tell them to speak up, to shout, to raise their voices a few times, and they did. They had a comic timing that was spot on. They replicated what I heard under the ladder impeccably, yet gave each reading a bit of a varied nuance. Naturals. Perfect! With some nods and a gesture with my arms, I implored them to keep going, and I came between them, centered on the gazebo steps with them to the left and right of me. I began an interpretive dance. Terrible. Just arms and faces and sways. Nothing much. Although I got into a bit of a trance. I imagined a bayou preacher speaking in tongues, playing with snakes, and I lost myself in the moment. It felt good to be brash, nonsensical, unreserved, out there in an improvisational space I had created for myself. My actors seemed to get caught up in what I was doing, and they successfully paced their lines to the beat of my ecstasy. The whole thing lasted about five minutes. Ten minutes? I ended it by approaching each actor and muffling their mouths with my hands as I danced. "Not much to see up there" was quieted first. "All will be revealed!" after.

Silence. But everyone was paying attention. Applause? No, of course not. But a bafflement. A pleasure. A polite recognition of an effort made. Was I looking for cracks? I was looking for cracks. I am looking for cracks. Some light. Got in. Here. At the play. All will be revealed. I know it.

I congratulated my actors. I praised their performance. They seemed pleased. That I was pleased. They seemed amused. At the novelty of it. Baffled that I was taking such pleasure from it, whatever it was, I'm sure they thought. I asked if they would like to do it again. If they would like to come up with two more lines. Or more. If they would like to

rehearse. Put something together. That was going too far. I pulled back. Again tomorrow? Did they know anyone else who would like to participate? Most of the time here I get this subtle nod, this wisp of affirmation. Sure, I guess. More than that, even the word "yes" would break the cocoon of modesty and humility that surrounds and encompasses not only the humans here, but the rocks and trees as well. A genuine modesty. An honest humility. Sorely lacking in our world. Not found in the monks of Tibet, this thing. The very thing you need to shed when you grace the stage. Maybe that's why I'm doing this. A play. Stand up there. Hit the high note. Bravo! So anathema to all this. I hope it gives me some purchase, some connection to this. Or maybe I'm just after some fun.

I will come back here tomorrow and hope somebody will show up. I hope they play more games. Games I understand. A connection.

Interview part 4

“Tell me about Sam.”

“Let me guess. You read about her in his journal.”

“I did. Friend of yours?”

“Yes, we’ve been friends for a long time. As much as you can be a friend to Sam.”

“He liked her a lot. Would you say that they were friends?”

“Yes, I would. It was my suggestion that they meet.”

“Was it?”

“I thought it would be good for both of them. For us. She’s a curmudgeon. A contrarian. It was an awkward beginning. With him. Bringing her into the mix, her perspective, seemed like a thing to do. Risky in a way, but shaking things up, and giving him another point of view right then seemed like a play. We were making it up as we went along. Did I mention that already? Setting him up with the most skeptical...the smartest, integral to our technological development, deeply connected to the start of all that, a person you can name that makes all this work...maybe they would lead us off on some new slant we weren't even thinking about.”

“Maybe she would blow the whole thing up.”

“That’s right. All the more reason for the introduction.”

“You use the word integral. I’m guessing they would have somehow interacted at some point, no matter what.”

“Yes, to use a metaphor, I was like a buzzing bee, pollinating everything, touching everything, in everyone’s business trying to make it work. She was like a Queen bee, an anchor, a grounding, a rock, no, a chest, a heavy chest holding all the stuff, the knowledge, the craft, the keys. Integral.”

“So there were, there are, people who played, play, more significant roles in all this. What you did before coming out, what you did as you came out, what you do now. You and Sam were two of those people?”

“If you asked her, she would demure. Vehemently. Friends, yes, but did we talk about these things? Was I involved or at all knowledgeable about what she did day to day? Her contribution? Not at all. I wasn’t interested in that. Our relationship wasn’t based on that.”

“What was it based on? How did you meet? You seem like a very odd couple.”

“Couple? No. We knew each other since we could remember. Very young. Playing together. Living together. She tinkered with things. Sought out the science and the people who were doing it. An innovator from what I understand very early on in her childhood. That continued. My path led me elsewhere, but we stayed close. To say anyone is close to Sam...to me, for that matter...not really, not in the way you would think about such things. But friends, yes.”

“I have friends like that. Not a lot in common, but friends just the same.”

“There you go.”

“Remembering that time, a good choice? Do you think their relationship benefited the outcome? Where we are today?”

“There it is again. Outcomes. Choices. One thing leading to another. I have no idea what you are asking. We were there then. We are here now. I’m not sure what I can add.”

“Fair enough. Forgive me. Such an outlier, Sam. Not on board. Skeptical. Part of me wonders why she contributed at all. How do you account for her attitude versus all the important work that she did? Is doing? She’s still active?”

“I don’t know that. Less active, I believe. She wouldn’t call it work, what she did. If anyone believed in a free and unfettered imagination and discovery through play, it was her. Skeptic aside, she always engaged in activities that interested her and gave her pleasure, for their own sake. Nothing more important to her. Thought of us as a folly, but always enjoyed her pastimes and investigations immensely. That was all that mattered to her. If our way of life could continue that, give her that, well, all the better.”

“I see this emerging now, everywhere. Giving each other the space to pursue that which fulfills us. And it makes for a better world. It works. Twenty years ago I’d have said you were crazy, that it would never work.”

“Why is that?”

“Do what you want, when you want? Forget your grand ambitions and seek out simple pleasures?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“Crazy.”

“Crazy to suffer and struggle unnecessarily.”

“Do you think she would speak with me?”

“No, I don’t. I’d leave that alone. Maybe the three of us could...no.”

“Ok. Moving on. I’d like to play a game with you. A word association game. I give you a word or two, and then you respond with whatever comes to mind first. Say anything.”

“We both speak English, but that’s about as far as it goes. We have very different viewpoints and different thought processes. I’m not sure what this will accomplish.”

“Speak in your language. Don’t concern yourself with being understood. I’m interested in just that, how your mind works. Maybe this game will tease something out.”

“I will try. The first thing that comes to mind? Just a word or two back?”

“No, more words if you like, just freely associate with what I ask.”

“Ok.”

“Money.”

“The exchange of goods and services. There are so many ways to do that. Currency can take many forms. When everything is freely shared, money isn’t necessary. Was that good? Like that?”

“Yes. Next one. Property.”

“You own this. I own that. This is mine and that is yours. Not part of my experience, that I would have my own personal property. I have everything I need and nothing I don’t. Everyone does. See what I mean? That word isn’t a part of our vocabulary.”

“I understand. This is a fun game for me, throwing out words and concepts that are not familiar to you. Fun to see how you will respond.”

“Ok. Next? Or more about property?”

“Next. Work.”

“Another word we don’t use. This distinction between work and play. Tasks that are required of you. So you can make money and buy property. An implication that you are doing something involuntarily. We play in the sunshine. We laugh at the rain. Set the alarm? Go to work for a fixed amount of time? Get paid? If that’s the type of work you mean...doesn’t exist in my world. Challenges, exertions, required tasks, maintenance...these things are met voluntarily.”

“Energy.”

“Abundant. Clean. It begins with energy. So much of what we enjoy comes from this. Our ability to harness and control this. Filter it. Direct it. Without constraint or limit. So much so, I don’t even think about it. We don’t think about it.”

“Government.”

“Governance. We eliminated much of what you call Government. Elected officials. Bureaucracies. Laws. Edicts. Taxes. Judgements. When everyone is provided for, not just material things but immaterial things. All things mind, body, and spirit. Governance takes care of itself and fades into the background.”

“Spirit.”

“Everything that isn’t mind and body. The presence outside and inside our physical reality. Unquantified. Undefined. We are more than the sum of our parts. There is something present. Easy to call it spirit.”

“Art.”

“This is a word game. What are you referring to? Decoration? All things poetic and beautiful? The search for beauty? It’s creation?”

“Sure. That. Go ahead.”

“Another distinction you make that we don’t make. We don’t celebrate a few artists. We don’t sign the things we create. Craft. Conversation. This. Many things. Most anything. Art. This is what I think you mean by art, this is something that is pursued. Explored. Played with. We are always making art. Writing poetry. It’s a focus. A group ambition. Maybe that’s the wrong word. We fill our moments with art because it gives us pleasure. I’m failing here.”

“No, you’re not. Good. Next. Sickness.”

“This has been minimized. And where it does exist, in the micro and the macro, it is recognized and dealt with gently and compassionately. We are preemptive on this front to the point where major illness, and minor injury, are rare. I can’t remember the last time my body was sick or I was injured. Can I? I cut myself in the kitchen? That’s not sickness. That’s an injury. Disease? Sorry, nothing occurs to me right now. You should visit one of our infirmaries if you want more on this.”

“Ok. I will. Technology.”

“Magic.”

“Magic?”

“I like Magic. And Mystery. Don’t you? For me, that’s what technology is and I intentionally keep it that way. I don’t need to understand it. And it supports and makes possible so much of what we have already spoken about. The abundance. The ease. The pleasure. The leisure.”

“Yes. Leisure. Speak to that.”

“I don’t know. Leisure. Your word. I’m trying to play the game. How am I doing?”

“Very well. I am enjoying it. Are you?”

“Yes, I am.”

“Leisure implies its opposite. Opposites. Black and white. Darkness and light. Seeking a balance between opposites. Finding harmony beyond that balance. Basking in its perfection. Ah. Language. Beyond balance. Harmonic perfection. This hints at something. That’s about it, nothing more. To define it would be to destroy it.”

“Flow.”

“Our fascination. To a fault, I would say. We neglect objects and fetishize the relationships, the transitions, and the flow. Fetish. Is that the word? I think it is. Our collective fetish. We know the flow is so. We are careful not to interrupt the flow. We also manipulate it for our pleasure. We play with the flow of things.”

“The game everyone plays all the time. About this?”

“Yes. Very much. If I were you, engaging in this activity, this search for knowledge, you would be well served exploring this part of our nature. That’s what you are after? An understanding of our true nature?”

“That puts too strong a point on it. My current pastime is looking back on the time when you introduced yourself and shared your gifts. The genesis of that. This word game. Not important. A light bridge between our spirits. A search for harmony.”

“So poetic. Artful.”

“You flatter me. Keep playing?”

“Your choice.”

“This exchange brings to mind another question I wanted to ask. Buddhism. Taoism. The Way. Eastern philosophies. Generally speaking. Your courtyard has an Asian aesthetic. Your daily activities remind me of what I picture a Tibetan Monastery to be like. Is there a connection here? A history? Are you that? Is your flow and focus on it connected to this? The Tao? The Way? Once, I heard the Tao being compared to water. If water does anything, it flows. Am I on to something here?”

“Not really. I think this is a misconception. That you and many others have. If we have deep roots in Buddhism or Taoism, if our origins are from these philosophies, I am unaware of it. I think it’s interesting that there are parallels, and there certainly are, but it doesn’t go much further than that, as far as I know. Our Asian courtyard. Deep meaning? Multi-layered history? Sewn into the fabric of that? No. An aesthetic. Nothing more. Philosophy. Religion. Thought. From what little I

know about it, I would say we have a lighter touch. Almost a disregard. A detachment. Not deep. Not dense. If that makes any sense. I fear it doesn't."

"It does. Helpful. I would say that this was a big hurdle, and still is. But the integration of Culture, Family, Tradition, Faith of all kinds, Philosophies; I would say this is happening. We were and are attached to these things and let them go reluctantly. We are embracing them again now."

"And it is a benefit? I hope so."

"I think so. I hope so, too."

Nineteen

There is no time here. No clocks. No watches. No alarms. No timers in the lab. No noon day siren. No schedules. No appointments. The cafeteria. The courtyard. Always open. The lab. The Insectarium. Always open. When I get to speak to Maggie? No idea. The courtyard is open air, and there is morning, noon, and night, but no time, really. The Wall Street ringing of the bell. A New York Times deadline. Trains and planes ETAs. Nope. No one is ever late. No one is ever early. Schedule a rehearsal or performance? Not a chance. See my new partner at the Insectarium? Maybe. Certain tasks are attended to here. But no punch in. Or punch out. The game that's played. The strange sit-around-gesture-word-telepathy-poem-swap thing I don't have a clue about...I see it being played for about five minutes then abandoned, and I also see it lasting for more than twenty four hours. The more I try to zoom in on something, get a hold of its duration, its place in time, the more it eludes me. And the more I become disinterested and unconcerned about it. The way you are envious of a retired person who doesn't have to know what day of the week it is. But not envious, because I'm in the same boat. It doesn't matter what time it is. It's not needed. I hear that a lot. We have everything we need. And isn't that a strong wish? To be free of the pressure that mechanical time has inflicted on us. Absolutely necessary in the modern world. A strict adherence to a universal time standard for everyone and everything. Yet here, in this place that seems to run itself, it is not needed...or is it just invisible? Did I see a twinkle in my lab partner's eye? What compelled my new friends to shout the same words over and over? As much as I am admiring this community...did I just call it a community? Yes! Much more like a community than a prison...maybe some here long for and admire what they see in me. They recognized me, right from the start. Or maybe that's just my vanity. I am famous. I'm a wayward son from a prominent family. Wayward. Not really. I was just embarking on a mission of activism. Non-violent. Making strides. Progressing. Popular. Populist. But to be taken from my home and dropped into this place, this place that, in many ways, is what we are working towards, that's crazy...I don't get it. I don't know how long I have been here and I am ceasing to care. I like it here. There's much to admire. It's easy. It's warm. Everyone has everything they need. Is it a party? Is it ecstatic? Do joyful tears and heartfelt thanks spill endlessly into the....no, they don't.

"There's a time for everything...a time to be born, a time to die...." What if there is no time? What if there is a time, but it is somehow lifted away, put so deeply in the background that it becomes more like a bed, or a sensory deprivation tank, some unseen platform on which we sail? I can't put a finger on it. I can't connect the dots. But maybe that's what I'm being shown. Maybe my efforts are misguided. Maybe I need to shake off the logic, and the time, and the need, and the desire, and relax into the waters in which I swim. Can I let go of the time, the urgency, the mission, the events of my little universe? Who are these people? How do they think? What questions should I ask? Stop typing and go to the Insectarium and ask if you can help. Do some simple task. Enjoy it.

"Just look into the microscope and see if there are any anomalies. From the picture I've shown you. All the organisms should look like that. If they don't, tell me. If they do, make a note and move to the next slide. Ok?"

Unlike anyone else, my new lab partner had a directness and refreshing blunt candor I adored. I wanted to please her. I hoped she liked me, but that was odd to think of considering her manner. In this place, to me, she was charming. I

wanted to pick her brain, but her brain, her mind, was untouchable. The courtesy. The politeness. No time for that, and I loved it. I told her everything looked fine after about twenty slides and she just shrugged and gestured that I should continue. I wanted to chat. Small talk. But that wasn't part of her vocabulary. Just do what she has asked you to do. After a few more slides, I saw something. She rolled her eyes and asked me to describe it, rather than look herself. I think she was trying to teach me something.

"Well, a few of them in this slide look swollen. Not larger, but slightly swollen. And slightly off color. And they are a bit more active."

"Good. Let me look. Ok. I'm giving you another set of slides. See if they are all like this. Can you do that?"

I said yes and continued. She put me off when I inquired about what I was doing exactly. I hoped for more information, but was enjoying the activity.

I came to the end of a set of slides and rubbed my eyes.

"Had enough? These little buggers treat the soil that is used in the courtyard for the plants. To grow in. It's important that we monitor them. So the plants grow properly."

"Thanks for that. I'd like to learn more about all of this. I don't want to trouble you, but..."

"You will. Keep coming back. I need your help. I have to go."

Then she leaned over and whispered in my ear. I could barely hear it.

"Sam. I'm Sam. Don't lose yourself."

No big deal, right? My name is Sam. Well, here, now, I was... I don't think I've written about this before. Names. No names. Names aren't used. Maggie introduced herself right away. The only name I know other than Sam. When I asked her about this, she joked that "Hey, you" works just fine and that names are not something that...that she acts as a liaison, a counselor, an aide, and she felt it would be awkward to start our relationship without it. Never asked me or addressed me by my name. And now, here was Sam, whispering in my ear, advising me not to lose myself. Don't lose yourself? Exactly what I was feeling. Being lulled to sleep, drinking the Kool-Aid, being gaslit by a monstrous power bent on my indoctrination and assimilation. Actually, I quite liked it here, more each day, and wasn't feeling any of that. Names just weren't important, and that was okay. Now this. Now Sam. I need more from Sam. Why her? Is she an outlier? Is she the key to my mission to lift the veil? To draw back the curtain? You know my name. Everyone does. Now I know Sam. Don't lose yourself. Okay. I won't.

"If you separate a man from what he loves most, what you do is purge what's unique in him. And when you purge what's unique in him, you purge dissent. And when you purge dissent, you kill the revolution!"

I used the search engine to find this. John Reed? Warren Beatty? Not sure.

Don't lose yourself. I've been hypnotized by the graceful, easy stillness here. Everything melts into everything else, and I am melting into that. I do feel myself slipping away, into the...

There's a lot to admire here. It appears to be an experimental community, and not a prison. I am so distant from the people here. I'm not sure if they are actors or volunteers or prisoners or pioneers or time travelers. But it is good. It works. It runs itself. Everybody has what they need. All they need. Suffering and desire are absent. In one man's dream, this is what we are sailing to, landing on Oscar Wilde's Utopia. Lost Horizon. Shangri-La.

Now Sam is telling me not to lose myself. She was immediately, instantly, the most interesting person I have ever met. Not just here, anywhere, and she is not melting. Studying bugs. Brilliant. Uniquely so. If I can learn anything about this place, this lab, this park, but also this heart, this spirit, this self, she can teach me.

I think I can be myself here. I have not been told not to do anything, or stopped from doing anything. Climb the ladder. Do your dance. We're not telling you anything. Any secrets. We are showing you a better way to do it.

There must be, there is, an advanced underlying technology and scientific advancement and mechanistic wizardry at work here that is far beyond my scope. Of that, I'm more sure of anything.

Wouldn't that be grand? Some clandestine, resourceful, wealthy conglomerate creating and sustaining environments where everyone is provided for. Huh.

Sam. My name is Sam. Don't lose yourself.

Maybe magic is the wrong word. Supernatural. Mystical. Transcendental. Metaphysical. Paranormal. Otherworldly. Extraordinary. Mysterious. Outside of my everyday experience. Extrasensory. Unexplainable. Something I would call magic happened to me today and I wanted to write about it here.

My own private property. I'm guessing everyone has something. Something they call theirs. That they keep secret. A photo. A book. Jewelry. We don't talk about this. We don't share this. We are not supposed to want or need our own things. I have a bag of rocks. They are mine. No one knows about them and I have owned them for a long time, since childhood. I have kept them hidden. I only bring them out occasionally. I wrote about this earlier. How I go to the roof and play with them. Make shapes on the ground. A ritual. Another thing that is absent here. Is that why I do it? Play with my rocks? What space am I trying to fill? Not what I wanted to write about here.

I didn't see a way to secretly get on the roof today. So I decided to make sketches. Draw shapes. That I might use later. I try to make different shapes each time, and that is increasingly difficult because of how long I've been doing this. Thousands of shapes. I thought drawing my ideas might help me for next time I'm on the roof. Not today. Draw instead.

There is a drawing kit in the common room of my dorm. No one would think twice about me making some sketches. Just amusing myself. Scratching out some ideas. The kit is a small brown wooden briefcase, holding pencils, graphite sticks, rulers, a small human model, sandpaper, and a pad of paper. Anything you might need to draw. Drawing. Something I never do. Not even sure why I thought of it. I wanted to play with my gems. This seemed like a good substitute activity.

I found a chair and a small table against a wall, and I sat with my back to the room. I pulled out some of the pencils and read the markings on them. 2B, HB, 6B. Graphite sticks staining my fingers. I twirled the small sharpener around the tip of a pencil, making a sharp point, and started in.

Simple. Rudimentary. Just lines into shapes. Representing my stones, which are mostly spherical, mostly the same, small grape size, with small circles. Arranging those circles into shapes. Trying to come up with new shapes. Shapes that didn't remind me of anything else. That looks too much like the letter X, no good. What if I changed that line? These were my thoughts. Thoughts dissolving into a daydream. A veiled letting go. Hard to explain, this drift. This emptiness. Still drawing, but I was no longer focused on it. Out of focus. Blurry. Yes. Especially on the periphery of my vision. I'm not sure how long this lasted. The foggy state I was in. The magic happened in there, somewhere. The pencil was moving. Marks were being made. But I was no longer controlling it. Even in my fog, I knew this to be true. I wrote before about being on the roof and transitioning into a kind of netherworld. An in-between. This was not that. Very different. Unfamiliar to me. Frightening. And I was unable to break away from it, which I was trying to do. Controlled. A puppet. My drawings were of new shapes. My goal, but these were shapes I hadn't thought of. Wouldn't think of it. Did I feel something touching my hand? My Arm? No, I didn't. Did I feel a presence? I wrote about angels. Not that either. What was it? Can I describe it here? Apart from the new marks, the strange and wonderful marks, being made? That was all it was. The feeling that I wasn't drawing. That the marks being made weren't my own. Acutely aware of this despite my semiconscious state. The page quickly filled with shapes and then began to overlap. I wanted these shapes. I knew they were important, but now they were being distorted by the layering. My fear of being out of control morphed into

distress that I was losing these new ideas. Anger. I needed a new page. I felt unable to find a new surface. Unable to do anything but weirdly monitor myself scratching pencil marks on paper. Not myself. My body but not my intention. My arm but someone else's vision. Something else? Did all this stop suddenly or gradually? I'm not sure. I felt the perspiration on my forehead, the stinging in my eyes, the dampening of my shirt. I could finally see the page as myself. Disappointment. A scribble. So many lines obscured the work underneath, which I knew was what I needed. How did I know that? That the first shapes drawn were the most beautiful, the most desired? An intuition? I don't know. I tried to decipher what I had done. To see the purer shapes underneath. I knew I had three or four designs of value, but that was all. If this had ended even a short time earlier, I would have twenty. I knew that. I know that. How do I feel about all this now that time has passed and I can write about it? I'm not sure. I know I will use some of what I did on the roof. Hopefully soon. I know it was frightening and that I would rather not have that happen again. Maybe my drawing days are over. Or would that be a mistake? Had I tapped into something? Repeat the experiment? Would it happen again?

Twenty

"When life itself seems lunatic, who knows where madness lies? Perhaps to be too practical is madness. To surrender dreams — this may be madness. Too much sanity may be madness — and maddest of all: to see life as it is, and not as it should be!"

I'm not sure why I put Don Quixote into the search engine. This popped up. There is no madness here. This is life as it should be. Can I see past my own myopic view of things and get to the marrow of this place and these people? Am I Don Quixote in reverse? Idealism. Dreams. I always related to him. There's no place for him here because it all is as it should be. And that is keeping me from any equilibrium. I'm used to being Quixote in a messed up world. Now I'm the skeptic in a perfect system. I'm without tools. My magic spells don't work here. I should be glad for it, but I only wonder. I only question.

I was encouraged to see that my actors had recruited two others, and that the lawn was filling up. Twice as many as yesterday. I found a musician, the lyre player I had seen before, and then another, one playing a small flute, recorder-like, instrument. Could they play together?

I asked them to discuss this amongst themselves while I chatted with my actors. Would they dance with me? What words would they use this time? We would continue with the theme of opposites, and we would improvise.

Maybe that's what's missing here, what I'm missing. There are no contrasts, no fight, no struggle. The swinging of the pendulum. That's what I wanted to put out into this world, if only to pretend. Pretending. Quixote. It's all pretend. To see a child at play. Therein lies the essence of things. I was pleased that my actors seemed to get it innately, that they were playing along with my silliness with an instinctual grasp of that pretense. Pretense for its own sake.

One actor would start with anything and the next actor would state its opposite. I asked them to play around with that. It didn't have to be exact. Whatever came into their minds would be good. Just keep up the pace. Use that great timing and rhythm from the day before.

My musicians said they would play at the same time, but not necessarily together. That would sound better. That's the spirit! Ok. Places, everyone.

I announced our show, shouted our invitation, and nodded to the company. It was a mess at first. But I let it happen. The awkward pauses seemed to dissipate, and the music slowly began to fill the cracks nicely. This time I danced amongst the audience, and playfully provoked them nonsensically. Was today's show better? Not really. But the engagement had intensified. From the actors, musicians, and audience. Everyone was letting it in, playing along, and seeming to get some pleasure from it. Noisy. Incomprehensible. A mess. A beautiful mess.

There was Sam. I was pleased to see her watching my show. She seemed delighted and surprised. She giggled when I went past. I only glanced at her briefly, but could tell she was involved. Our improvisation had sparked a vibrant energy that seemed to envelope the lawn. That energy attracted more people. The lawn was almost full now. The largest gathering I had seen. A large gathering. I had made it happen. That was enough for now. I pointed to each player and gestured that they solo a bit, and had everyone else quiet down. An ill-equipped clown conductor, flailing arms and legs, directing an amateur troupe of neophyte thespians. Yes, it was a mess, but it worked. It thrilled me that this nonsense was

in the air. For no other reason but to play. To pretend. This absurdity. Shedding light through the cracks. A celebration of self. A shout into the void. Not the void. A paradise. An unsolicited wish for beauty.

My audience began to disperse. I think their cordial hearts had become uncomfortable with the density of the gathering, the noise of the play. I should have ended it sooner. But a messy ending seemed inevitable.

What was in Sam's look when she walked past? Approval? Understanding? Validation? Consent? All that wrapped in an introverted, apprehensive blush. I knew there was nothing to be said. I wouldn't mention it at the lab. I wouldn't invite her back. I wouldn't fish for a compliment. What I would do was try this again when the time felt right. Yeah, right....Time?

I just blurted it out to Sam the next time we were at the lab together.

"What's with the missile launches? Is that what I hear occasionally? Missile launches? Rockets? What is that?"

"I don't know. I hear them, too. No one talks about it."

"No one talks about anything around here."

"Yes, that's good."

"Hah! Yes, it is. Too much talk. Blah, blah, blah. But if you had to guess. Satellites? Weapons? Space? War?"

"All those things. I don't see the point of speculating."

"Fair enough. I guess it concerns me. I guess I'm trying to solve a mystery. The mystery of why I am here and what this place is."

"No mystery. You are here. Now. Helping me with the bugs."

"Am I? I'm glad. Most of the time I feel like I'm in the way."

"You're helping me with the bugs."

"Don't lose yourself, you said."

"Did I?"

This elicited the first angry response that I could remember. From anyone here. I crossed a line. She had whispered it to me softly, and here I was, conversationally exposing it to whoever. She told me a secret. I had breached a trust.

She left. Without a word. I wanted to tell her that my inquisitiveness was a way to keep myself. Not lose myself. Grounded. Aware. I'm not sure I'll ever see Sam again. I'm certainly not going to mention losing myself, or anything to do with self. Not until she brings it up first.

I asked around about where and how people lived. Where they slept. I said I lived alone and was content with my accommodations. This was surprising, almost shocking, as anyone could be shocked here. Alone? No, we don't live alone. No one does. I was the only one with this arrangement? Yes, as far as anyone knew. I asked if I could see their living

quarters. They immediately escorted me there without a question. I am continually flummoxed by what is open and what is closed here. The information not offered and the information freely given. I was happy for the tour.

A dormitory. A hostel. Not a hotel, but an open spaced, spare, functional, inviting communal home. A suite of larger, high ceiling rooms, common areas, shared lavatories and showers, and bunk beds. Each room is set up for a dozen or so. Men and women together. If you were to design the perfect group home, this would be it. Minimal furnishings, but everything you need. Sofas. Tables. Bookshelves. Did I recognize any of the titles? Not really. Really? So much of this place is grounded in familiarity, yet so much like a strange movie set. A foreign language. For me? I was the only one here living alone? Where were my compatriots? They took only me? I'm famous. Here. There. But not a soul. I don't know anyone here. This can't be all for me? I'm just a bit player, a newcomer, to an immense struggle. Why go through all this? This elaborate, high tech....can't be.

I thanked everyone for the tour. I decided to skip the bugs, and come back here to write this. Maybe I will skip the show tomorrow. How would I patch things up with Sam? To have blown it with her was bad. I felt bad. She would probably prefer to move on, and forget the whole thing. Don't mention self. Don't mention missiles. Just help with the bugs, and trust that what needs to come next will come next.

I finally got a chance to return to the roof. I was anxious to use the shapes that came from my drawing session. The shapes that I didn't draw. The shapes that appeared when I was out of control and in a semi-conscious fog. They were buried under the fevered scribbling the session became. I looked long and hard at the paper and teased out three distinct shapes, which I drew again on a clean sheet. Three shapes I would have never thought of myself and that I had never seen before. They didn't belong to me, these shapes, these symbols. They came to me. Delivered, somehow, from somewhere, to the tips of my fingers and the hand that held the pencil. Maybe these shapes just caught my eye and interest. The drawing did become unguided and with no intention. Ending in manic scratching and marking, but before that calmly directed. These three shapes, a few times over. How do I know this? What am I feeling? Discovery. Fascination. Eager to make these shapes with my stones. Compelled.

One of the designs, symbols, was a grouping of four small circles of the same size. One on top, one in the middle, and two to the sides below that. If you drew a line bordering them, it would be a triangle. This appeared exactly the same a few times on my messy sheet. It was plain to see this grouping was distinct. Another was a stylized Q, one with a longer tail, and that tail had a wavy tail. The tail was as big as the O it was connected to. So not a Q, a Q with a big, long, wavy tail. The third symbol was a U with a flat bottom and two sides curving inward and a straight line splitting the bottom. Like a trident with one, shorter middle fork. I carefully folded the page where I had copied these shapes and tucked it into my pocket. I didn't need it. These images were etched on my brain. Memorized. Permanent outlines. Visions. That needed to be recreated on the roof with my gems. I had something new to add to my practice and that was the goal, always. To make something new. To play with that. A ritual of discovery. An invention. The movement of the rocks sliding on the floor. A dance. A push and pull. A gentle, ephemeral conjuring for the pleasure that brings. A conception. A detached state of mind attained. A connection.

No one saw me go up the ladder and onto the roof. This is an important part of this activity. That it's private. That no one knows, or will ever know of it. The gems I call my own. The spot on the roof that is mine, alone. It had been too long between opportunities. I was quenching a long-felt thirst. The desire to rid myself of desire. To escape my surroundings. The silence of solitude. The quiet. The only sound being the friction of the mineral on the floor, sliding.

I typically begin the process slowly, taking the rocks out of their small velvet bag one at a time, organizing them, and inspecting them. Not this time. I dumped them out and began to construct the novel forms quickly and spontaneously.

Once I had the basic outline, I perfected it. Lined it up exactly with the image in my frontal lobes. Next shape. Quickly now. And another. And another. Is this why consciousness remained static? My manic ambitions blocking the pathways? Even when I slowed down to my normal pace, I remained there. This mode repeated often easily takes me to another plane. Not difficult. Not complicated. Every time I can work myself into a passivity. An effortless letting go of the self. The self-combining. Dissolving. Dreaming. Not now. Not coming. I began to struggle and puzzle. Was it because these shapes were not mine? That they had been received? Gifted? I tried to quell my disappointment as I repeated and repeated the play, the sliding, the forming, the motions. I only felt further and further away from the state I desired. No, I didn't desire it. Releasing. Relaxing. Forgetting. Melding. Floating. I stopped and took breaths and started again, to no avail.

The shapes were beautiful and pristine. I was pleased to have them in my collection, which now numbered in the thousands. Thousands of shapes. Formed with the rocks. Over and over. On the roof. Alone. I'm not sure how long I was there, sitting hunched over my stones on the floor of the top of the wall that borders our community. Would I try again with these shapes? Or go back to familiar practices? Tried and true designs? That comforting dreamlike trance? Easily obtained? I tried to let go of these thoughts as I placed my rocks back into the bag. Back to the ladder. And my home.

This was new. The shapes. The frustration. I needed to get my mind off it. Do something else. Try another day. Or did I? What were these shapes? Why had they come to me? Why had they disrupted my flow? The Flow? What had happened while I drew? What was that frantic state? Of uncontrolled art? Doodling. Nothing. Just playing. Not important. Do something important. As I went over my options for that day, my responsibilities, and the various problems and public activities that would invariably occur, I cornered my curiosity. Confronted it. Wait, what were these shapes? Were they unique? I needed to know more about them. My shapes, the ones I had created since childhood, had no significance other than figures to be played with. Exercised. No meaning outside their simple essence. They were shapes and nothing more. Shapes that help me meditate and achieve a trance-like state. Not these new shapes, I knew it. They were a symbol for something else. Did I know this? How did I know this? Had I seen them before and not remembered? Were they part of my history? Our history? Histories pushed into the background? Disregarded. Detached from the present. Were they from the past pointing to the future?

I have knowledge, but it's mostly about our world. The community I live in. I am not prohibited from seeking out information from anywhere. I just don't as a rule. I am not a researcher. I am not interested in the history of other cultures and spend most of my time focused on what is happening in front of me. It's limited. What I know. My education. My

experience. I'm sure my naive notions about many things are skewed and incomplete. But information about what had just happened to me and why? I needed that right away. What were these shapes? These symbols?

I did an image search. On my computer. I was surprised at how many links were generated. How many articles and books and papers and letters and numbers and equations and scientists and philosophers and mathematicians and historians. I quickly skimmed a few posts and a few encyclopedic entries.

The Aether. Ether. Quintessence. The fifth element. Investigations into magnetism and electricity and particles and waves. Mediums.

"The aether is the solitary tenant of the universe, save for that infinitesimal fraction of space which is occupied by ordinary matter."

"It appears therefore that certain phenomena in electricity and magnetism lead to the same conclusion as those of optics, namely, that there is an ethereal medium pervading all bodies, and modified only in degree by their presence; that the parts of this medium are capable of being set in motion by electric currents and magnets; that this motion is communicated from one part of the medium to another by forces arising from the connections of those parts; that under the action of these forces there is a certain yielding depending on the elasticity of these connections; and that, therefore, energy in two different forms may exist in the medium, the one form being the actual energy of motion of its parts, and the other being the potential energy stored up in the connections, in virtue of their elasticity."

James Clerk Maxwell

From what I gathered, these terms, these ideas, were ancient, antiquated, and no longer in fashion. Debunked. Other terms and concepts taking their place. Obvious, conspicuous, for centuries, the Aether. An invisible, weightless medium carrying waves and other forces throughout the Universe. Permeating every space. All of Space. Every pore. Every crack. Filling. Flooding. Interacting imperceptibly. With all things, all the time. The Ocean in which everything swims. I am still gathering information about this. I needed to take a break and come back to this writing.

We constantly amuse ourselves with confusion and not making sense. It's deeply ingrained in our thought processes and our communication. A way to detach ourselves. To break the logic and linear paths and outcomes. If anything, this was that. It didn't make sense. This uninvited apparition. These symbols from a bygone era outside of my existence. Did our scientists and engineers use the Aether in their equations and problem-solving? I know no science. None to speak of. None to write here. If I asked, would I be exposed? What would anyone think of this quintessence? Was it a metaphor? Do I feel its energy when I escape myself? Who or what presented this to me? And why? Why has all this felt so grounded in reality? If it was pointing to something supernatural, why had it had the opposite effect? To the extreme? I feel now as if I will never return to that state I have rigorously opened time and again. It grounds me and keeps me centered, this ethereal mood I can create. Well, I have created it in the past. Will I again? Is someone stopping me? Warning me? Shapes used in obsolete equations.

“A material substance of a more subtle kind than visible bodies, supposed to exist in those parts of space which are apparently empty. The aether may contain various ‘aetherial spirits’ adapted to produce the phenomena of electricity, magnetism, and gravitation. The laws of its connection(if it has any connection) with the particles of bodies, are utterly unknown...capable of flowing like a perfect fluid.”

Flowing. A fluid. Elastic. Relational. This is something to grasp. We know this. The flow. The fluidity. The connections.

“The existence of an all pervading plenum in the universe, in which every particle of tangible matter is immersed. Evading all direct efforts to detect it, yet existing everywhere in seemingly vacant space.”

Thomas Young? So many theories. Interpretations. I know this thing. I feel it, this aether. This cosmically radiant atmosphere. The sphere where the atoms abide. Am I being comforted? Is something being confirmed? Pointed to? Am I obligated to take some specific action as it relates to this revelation? What revelation? That inquisitive minds named some unnameable thing long ago, and that reveals something actionable here and now? Is it music? Poetry? Just that? Something recognized and enjoyed. For its own sake. Understood. Sensed.

“...the substrate within which particles are formed and through which physical forces are mediated.”

A physical force guided my hand that day. Marks onto the page. The Aether, metaphorically symbolized, mediated. An outside force? Was it? Shapes I had seen before and have forgotten about? An inside force? I knew nothing of this before I searched the images. An alchemical reaction between the elements of mind, spirit, and body. My body. My mind. My spirit. Other bodies of every size and description. Other minds from other dimensions. Other spirits from beyond the Ages. Spirit. Energy. Bouncing. Bubbling.

Flowing.

Twenty-One

I decided to put the brakes on everything I was doing. Not sure. No show. No bugs. No writing. No Maggie. I just needed to stop for a second and...just stop. I really messed up with Sam. I was second guessing what I was doing, with the shows and the questions and the digging and the speculations. As perplexed as I was about this place, I was also getting to like it. A lot. Feeling guilty about that. Stockholm syndrome, hah! Maybe if I felt more like a prisoner...but I don't. I could walk right out the front door if I knew where that was, and no one would blink. Some time off from everything seemed okay. Just relax. Won't be long. Some grand negotiation was taking place if I read the video right, and I just needed to keep my wits about me. And I was frustrated. I needed to let go of that. Frustration. Anger. Argument. The fraying of nerves. Conflict. Vying for space. Intense emotion of any kind. Not here. Lukewarm. Always room temperature. Like they have all that licked. I don't, and I feel that an outburst, which is what the shows were, was a bad idea, at least for now. I stayed mostly in my room for I don't know how long, and I contemplated all this. Well, I stopped contemplating for a long time and distracted myself with some light reading and surfing on the laptop. Rest. Have I noticed anyone being sleepy, or tired, or fatigued, or cranky? No. I wanted the secret recipe. I wanted to free myself from those things inside of me. The desire. The attachments. The baggage. Am I getting there? Is getting there some place away from myself? Where's the self? And how does it fit in here? Just as I was putting all that aside, relaxing, and forgetting, and feeling better and centered, I saw another video clip, same as before. Same size. Same duration. Same grainy resolution.

It started with letters zooming at me, one after another. "You are here!" Maybe twice or three times, fast. I almost missed it, but yes. "You are here!" That's what it said. I'm sure of it. I'm unable to recall or replay any of these videos I have seen. I can't find them on my hard drive. They play once, then they're gone.

The video was of this facility. Here! I couldn't believe it. How? No cameras here. Not that I have noticed. An overhead drone shot of the courtyard, beautifully composed. I never saw a drone. The lab, the cafeteria, the dorms, and what I took to be a shot from the outside, from a distance. Just a nondescript, off-white warehouse like structure. In the woods. I am in the woods! Is that it? Yes, overall a quick comprehensive look at the place. It was here. What else could it have been?

Yes, I'm here! Where did you get that? How did you get that? Maybe there is more than one of these facilities? Hard to call it a prison. From all I have written here, you get that. If there is only one, then YES! I am here!!

So my friends have seen it. Has everyone seen it? What could this possibly mean? The second clip, of the negotiations, the summits. Is this video a part of that? Why would it be? A whistleblower? Exposing this? No way. They must have decided to put it out there. But taking a top secret, highly advanced facility that most would call a prison and say, "Hey, check it out! Come on in! Visitor's Day!" That's crazy. Stay calm. To see this. To know it's out there. Has it been publicly announced that I'm here? Or have my friends just figured that out from the writing here? I'm not sure of anything. You could turn everything I think and feel on its head and all that could be the truth. If you have no Truth, no grounding, no standing....what then? How many times have I typed that? Hah! This is good. I have to hold on to that. My friends have seen this place. They have read what I have written here. And I'm thrilled. I will be thrilled, even if I'm just making that up. This can only be a good thing. It can only bolster the "won't be long" I see on my laptop and hear from Maggie. Maggie? When should I come clean? When should I tell her about the videos? That my friends have access to this laptop, every keystroke. She must know. She must. If she does, I'll let her blink first. Withholding this information, it's lying. It is.

I shouldn't lie. But I'm a prisoner! A top secret agent! Infiltrating a vast cartel of dark-lords and monsters! Hah! Am I? I'm a guest at Shangri-La?

I'm a guest at Shangri-La. They wanted to show me first. Because I am a famous prince of a powerful and influential family that has broken ranks. On the vanguard of a movement that has become too big to contain. They are ready to put the hidden wealth and knowledge they have been developing on the plate of every poor and oppressed soul on this planet. A new way of living, for everyone. They want me to be an ambassador, proselytizing their new methods and systems and technology. Some naïve Joan of Arc, converted to their new religion. That's why I was taken. That's why I am here. I am here! And I am converted. I think so. Everyone's needs provided for. If anything is true, if I understand anything about this, that is true. Here, everyone's needs are provided for. The need to work and play. Needs concrete and imagined. What if it were true? What if it could happen? Many facilities. For many. All welcome. All provided for. This is what I have always believed, isn't it? That we have the ability to do this. There's enough of everything to go around, and if you were to distribute it evenly, it could happen. A peaceful place for everyone to be. To thrive. Only the suffering that one feels at birth and at death. The rest of it floating away. I am connecting the dots. I hope it's true.

So, time to lay all this on Maggie? I should let her blink first? They have a timeline? Is it disingenuous of me to hold back this theory, this conviction? Maybe I'll find the right moment and dump it on Sam. Wait!

"We have been asked not to talk about that." Is this the secret, or some form of it, that everyone is in on? Volunteers. Actors. Not actors. Not make believers. Believers. Believers taking part in a grand, unprecedented experiment. One they had to roll out early because of the gathering storm and discontent around the world. Believers asked to hold back their passions and hangups and misgivings for the sake of the project. Pilot project. Beta project. Maybe not. Maybe the keys are in the ignition and the engine is humming. Maybe we are off to the races in a few days. Won't be long.

Maybe now I have a secret I should keep. From Maggie. From Sam. "Don't lose yourself." Maybe that's Sam's big problem with all of this, and rightfully so. You do lose yourself here, and you don't miss it. And Sam sees something way wrong. Maybe I am part of the experiment. Maybe I'm the one who will be tasked to integrate the self, ourselves, into this and make it work. The shows. An innocent way to test the waters. That's why I'm allowed great latitude. If I stop what I'm doing? That's what I just did and maybe that was a big mistake. If I stop what I'm doing, that will let on that I know. The secret. The plan. The Great Unveiling. To the world. A new way of living. I won't stop what I'm doing. I won't let on what I know. What I think I know. The videos. My friends. My theory. Not now. Wait for it to happen. It's a big thing and I just have to be patient. Easy in a place where patience is not required. That word, that action, patience, doesn't exist here. Doesn't exist. You would need Time to need patience. Hah!

So. Bugs. Shows. Sam. A stroll in the park. Good for now. I am here, my friends! And we will all be here soon!

"Hi Maggie. Sick of me yet? Sick of all my ridiculous questions?"

"Not at all. Fire away."

"This place is wonderful. It truly is. Thanks for treating me so well. Thanks for giving me some space and rewarding work, and all of it. So tranquil. And easy. Everyone is just living. Without all the muck. I love it. But one thing is glaringly absent, and I wanted to ask you about it. There are men. There are women. But there is a non-binary thing

going on that's head scratching. The Sexes. Coupling. Romance. Displays of affection. Touching. Physical touches of any kind. I don't see it. I don't dare do it! What gives? How is all that so suppressed here? Drugs? If anything makes the world go round, it's the love and attraction between us. Desire. Where is it? Why isn't it anywhere here?"

"Desire. You've noticed an absence of that, yes? Not just between the sexes, but in all things. In the way of thought and presence and activity. We have everything we need here, and as fun as all that can be, it's just not needed here. It doesn't play into the equation."

"Like a monastery. Like a convent. Like that?"

"Okay, if that helps you put a bow on it, yes, like that."

"I would argue that even in those places, desire exists."

"Yes, it does. The way you are thinking of it, how could it not? It just isn't here. I'm struggling to explain it to you. I need some snappy koan. A way to break that logic."

"No, you don't. I'm good. That is clear. I think I get it. No desire, that's all. Okay."

"Okay."

"No desire, no fun. Some would argue this place is boring. Bland. Forgive me, but just for the sake of argument...wait! There's no arguing here! hah!...without it there's no rub, no agony, no ecstasy, no bliss, no abyss...just stasis."

"Fair enough. But is that what you are feeling? Are you bored? Ennui? Melancholy? More fun? You want more fun?"

"Hmm...you got me. Not really. Not missing it. Maybe my performances are letting off a bit of steam."

"I'm glad. From what I've heard, they are really quite something."

"You should come and see."

"I should."

"I'm done. Thanks again for seeing me."

"You're welcome."

These are notes and comments from my recent information search.

“The Aether is for sale for nothing.”

This was a slogan used in Paris during the 1950’s and 1960’s. Lettrist International? Slogans like this were spray painted on the walls throughout the city.

“It’s what’s in the world when there are no material objects.”

I believe this is from E.T. Whitaker’s history of Aether theories. This is science. Something I know very little about. I do know that there is a lot of stuff in the universe after you strip the material away. This I am sure of. I feel it all around me most of the time. When I play with my rocks, especially. Has someone or something simply confirmed this by showing me these symbols? Directing me to this information? What’s at play here? I must have seen these symbols and forgotten them. Inexplicably regurgitated. Now of all times. Now as the world dramatically changes and Us with it.

There’s no such thing as empty space.

More Paris slogans...

“Faith in the cryptic slogan.”

“The minimum and the maximum.”

“Chance must be systematically explored.”

Nothing is random. That is exactly right. This is what we play with every day. This is ingrained into our nature, our mores, our interactions, our exchanges, our conversations, our games, our thoughts, our every breath. Random. That these symbols, this inquiry, has obsessively taken over my consciousness. I think not. Not how or why it happened. Not important. Finding out more about what it says to me. Gaining an understanding as to the nexus of these postulates with what I know to be true already. Make connections, step by step. Find a foothold on the concepts presented to me, poetic and concrete.

Nothing is simple, but you can pretend that it is.

Chaos.

Fractals.

Understanding through distillation and basic, pure interpretation.

Serious laughter, trivial tears

Action at a distance

“The concept that an object can be moved, changed, or otherwise affected without being physically touched (as in mechanical contact) by another object.”

Quantum entanglement

“When two particles, such as a pair of photons or electrons, become entangled, they remain connected even when separated by vast distances.”

Strange attractors

“Unlike the randomness generated by a system with many variables, chaos has its own pattern, a peculiar kind of order. This pattern is known whimsically as a strange attractor, because the chaotic system seems to be strangely attracted to an ideal behavior.”

Gary Taubes

The notes you don't play, the things you don't say.

What exactly am I investigating here? The identity of an interloper? Some deeper meaning in some discarded knowledge from a bygone era of another culture alien to my own? What is it that am I trying to grasp? What was lost when I found it? The unfamiliar feeling of something being out of reach. Will I ever find that place I could get to quite easily when I formed shapes with my gems? New gems? More gems? Forget these new shapes and go back to the beginning? Always beginning.

A ubiquitous, solid, uniform medium throughout space and time. Where the dew drop of our perceived experience rests.

Twenty-Two

Another eye-opening, informative, rewarding day at the Insectarium. It's great because I can just hang out and observe as long as I want, until I ask if there is something I can do, and there always is. No one asks me first. I can ask anything, and everyone is very open and friendly and patient and willing to take time from whatever they are doing to accommodate me. I was allowed into where the moths are kept, a large netted enclosure housing thousands of them of every size and variety. I was asked to look for anything out of the ordinary; sick moths, dead moths, fighting moths, injured moths. I was given a clipboard for note taking. Much like everything here, the moths seemed content and healthy. Fluttering from net to feeding tube to lamp and back again. You would think this environment would be modern and sleek, but it felt antique. Homespun. Like a project done by Boy Scouts in the Depression. Nets knotted haphazardly together. Lamps out. Creaky wooden flooring. I still can't put my head around why so much of this facility seems from the future, and so much of it seems from the past. The answer I keep getting back to this question is that it works. That things aren't upgraded for the sake of being upgraded. If the old microscope makes the needed observations specific to that inquiry, then that works. No need for a more powerful microscope. The old, tired nets hold the moths in. The lamps do the trick. More and more I think that is all there is to it. Not clinging to the past in some sentimental way and not groping for the future in some misdirected, impractical way.

I was happy to see Sam walk in. Of course, it was like nothing happened between us. Sam is straightforward and brief, in a charming way that I really like. As much as I like pretense, there is no pretense with Sam, none, and that is refreshing. The politeness and courtesies and careful manner so prevalent here are non-existent in her. Not arrogant or grumpy or erudite or condescending, but real and sober and to the point. Chat about the weather with Sam? No. Get a simple answer to an unanswerable question? Yes. Talk about her work? Sure. Talk about me, or some inconsequential anything? No.

I was eager to help her, be her lab partner, but asked if we could walk around the place a bit. Without answering, she darted away, towards some large mounds of earth a few hundred yards away. This was a big place, with a lot going on, and I was hard pressed to keep up with her as I excused myself past many of her colleagues.

Anthills? Termite mounds? So intricate. And large. And teeming with life. Trails and trails of ants and termites interconnecting several mounds. Creatures carrying cargo in and out of an infinity of holes and cubbies and caves. This area was oddly unattended and unplanned, the ants and termites left to their own devices. There was a small conveyor belt in the corner, carrying fistfuls of soil up to the ceiling and through an opening. Sam said that the ecosystem here was complete, yet separated. For design purposes only. Nothing too complicated. It was decided that the courtyard would be free of bugs, but they would remotely provide the nutrients and chemicals and microorganisms that make the plants and trees and bushes and flowers grow and thrive. A complete system. Just compartmentalized. I asked about mice, small mammals, rodents, birds, livestock, cows and sheep, and dogs and cats. Not needed. Not part of this system. Were they anywhere? In this facility? Those animals? Not here, in this facility. That's all I got about that. I got the feeling more explanation about this was too complicated and not worth the effort. We went back to Sam's main work area and did some tasks we had been doing before. I enjoy helping Sam. I find the activities here, the buzzing, vibrating energy invigorating and fulfilling. The insects give off a life force that feeds me. Feeds a part of me that cannot get sustenance elsewhere. I hope I'm describing the joy I feel being here. With Sam. With the bugs.

I asked Sam if she would like to have lunch with me in the cafeteria. We finished up, walked the short distance between the two areas, and found a secluded place to sit and eat.

"Hey, thanks. For letting me work with you. For having lunch with me today."

"Uh huh."

"This place. This facility. Crazy! Amazing! I'm really getting to love it here."

"Please stop."

"What?"

"Just stop."

"Stop what?"

"Your enthusiasm. Your wide-eyed wonder. It's ridiculous. Giving me a headache."

"I'm sorry. I hoped I could talk to you about what I'm feeling. What I'm thinking about."

"Must you?"

"I guess not. What do you want to talk about?"

"You mean small talk? No thanks."

"Anything. Big talk. Can we talk a bit more freely? Are you comfortable with that?"

"Comfortable? I'm never comfortable."

"Why not? Everyone here seems so content. Autonomous. Unburdened. Peaceful. You're the only curmudgeon I've met."

"Curmudgeon?"

"Yes. What's wrong? Nothing wrong here. Is that what's wrong?"

"Well, if that's all you can get your head around, yes, that's what's wrong."

"The thing you whispered to me. That? Can we talk about that?"

"Robots."

"No personality. No expression. No individuality. That?"

"Is that what you think of when you think of robots?"

"I thought that's what you meant. I don't see robots. Not here. I think there is more going on, or not going on, than I can understand. Like I'm in the dark."

"You think? Maybe? That's true? Now we are getting somewhere."

"Ok, enlighten me."

"Wouldn't that be easy? Here's A, B, and C. Now you get it. Here's the light switch. Flick!"

"Ok. What do you think? About this place. Tell me something I can understand."

"For every argument, there is an equally weighted, persuasive counterargument."

"I'm not following."

"If the argument is this, this place, then I can poke a thousand holes in it, without really trying. I could go on forever about what is wrong with it."

"Please do."

"And the point of that would be to burst your bubble? To debate you? To...no thanks."

"Everyone works when they want, for as long as they want. No restrictions on anything, as far as I can see. There's no money. No hardship."

"No ambition. No fight."

"Well, if the ultimate ambition is to be free of that, free of war, and struggle, and suffering, then?"

"Who says that is the ultimate ambition?"

"Anybody would say that."

"I wouldn't. I think what is lost here is disgraceful."

Aether

material substance

subtle kind

visible

bodies existing

space empty

pervades pores bodies

cause cohesion density

free interplanetary spaces

single uniform substance

air aqueous vapor ethereal spirits

adapted phenomena

electricity magnetism gravitation

solitary tenant universe

infinitesimal

fraction

space occupied ordinary

matter engaged attention completely

resolved relation

medium interstellar void

condensations scattered combinations

qualities extreme

elastic solid vibrations

rapid light yielding fluid

slower

progression

motions planets

particles utterly unknown

ultimate

molecules

sensitive substances swinging

produce vibrations luminiferous

cause sensations light

ideal incompressible substance

rigid ordinary resisting absolute rotation

mediation space

flowing perfect fluid forming consistent

constituted knowledge existence

pervading plenum

universe particles tangible immersed

evading direct efforts to detect

everywhere

vacant space

interpenetrating substance

transparent liquids

solids substances no resistance

freely infinite

powerful energies motions universal

infinite extent basic form

distributed physical medium

permeates endows measurable physical qualities

substrates physical forces mediated

matrix

currents active

What's in the world when there are no material objects.

Twenty-Three

"I think what is gained is sublime. I want to be a part of it. If this is some grand experiment, some new way of living, a new society..."

"Whoa. Slow down. Who said anything about that? Not me."

"The food, for example. Off the charts. So well prepared and delicious. Every meal. Everyone helps out in the kitchen?"

"Either you care about something, or you don't care about it. Yes, everyone helps out. And there's a lot of, for lack of a better term, advanced technology, helping out too."

"Talk to me about that. The technology. And where does the power come from? The whole thing must be exorbitantly expensive."

"First, the group that built this has unlimited resources. Second, there is an energy source that is new. And cheap. A whole new way of powering things up. Third, groups of all kinds have been working behind the scenes, covertly, privately, secretly developing new technologies, new sciences, and new engineering. Not in the press. Not widely known. Not in the public sphere. This place benefits from all that. No, I can't go into it. Can we stop now?"

"Sure. Thanks for putting up with me. I was thinking of putting on another show. Join me?"

"You don't have to."

"Well, I know I don't have to, but..."

"Happening without you. Wanna see?"

"What?"

We made our way to the courtyard, to the knoll and gazebo where I'd been having my performances. There was quite a crowd. About twice the size of previous audiences. There were six performers in the stage area. A stage? They had modified the gazebo with a slightly raised platform jutting out several feet. A real stage! From what I could tell, the actors were playing the game I had seen in the courtyard earlier. Simultaneously. Gesturing. Poetry? I'm calling it poetry. The gesturing more like signaling. Charades? Yes, but not that. I have watched this game a lot and still don't have a clue. This version was more pronounced. Louder. Bigger. Had they adapted their game for theatrical purposes? That's what it looked like. The audience was loosely grouped, one set for each of the six performers, responding to the action on the stage. For the first time, I heard laughter. Real laughter. And shouting. Imagine being on a Stock Market floor, but the action is slower and a bit more choreographed. I was thrilled. I had sparked something. Something inside this community. I asked Sam about the game. If they were playing it. She said yes, this was that game, but in a heightened form. She knew the basic rules, but was terrible at it. And she said that you can't join in after it's started and have a clue. She wouldn't be able to even start explaining the whole thing to me.

That didn't matter. I was elated that this thing was happening without my prompting or participation. That everyone seemed more engaged, more alive, almost giddy. A real exchange was happening between performer and

audience, and everyone was taking real pleasure in it. I'm not sure what motivated me to suggest this activity. To put on a show. Just shaking things up. Fun. But now my conceit was that I had instigated some real change. A change in behavior. In attitude. Sam scoffed at this, but conceded that what we were watching was new, and lively in a good way.

"The old pond. A frog jumps in. Splash!"

Is that what I heard? Was it familiar? Maybe? Haiku. The phrases used in the game. Was it based on this form? This tradition? Sam nodded. Yes, loosely. The thing to understand about the game is that it changes, at its core, and that one of the main components of play is just that, tricking your opponent right from the start. Figuring out what is developing and improvising on that.

Compared to the relative calm of this place, this arena, this theater, this atmosphere, was electric. I tingled with the collective energy. They had taken their game and my theatrical cue and made something new. Something beneficial? Sam told me to dial back the hubris and vanity. But I think if I had fostered any respect from Sam, this was why. This thing. This new thing. It was good.

Different performers came onto the stage. Different groups started chanting...heckling?...in random order at different actors. It didn't matter that I was in the dark about the proceedings. Too formal a word. The entertainment. The sport. The game. The frivolity. The play. The abandon. Yes, they were playing with the idea of risk and adventure within the context of the contest. Sam nodded, as if to agree with my assessment. To fish for a compliment from Sam was a fool's errand. She discouraged me from joining in. Said I would just muck everything up and pull focus inappropriately. She was right. After watching for a while longer, we went our separate ways. As much as I could ever tell with Sam, I think she was pleased, surprised, and slowly warming up to me. Was she freely spending time with me? Or was she assigned to me? By Maggie? The two names I know. And she never asked me for mine. Maggie had only said hers once? When we first met? And Sam had whispered it once. No names. This was at the heart of what Sam was pushing back against. The self. What makes me, me. And you, you. Without that, what do you have? This community. This prison? Deeply flawed because of this. Maybe the Theater could bridge some gap, fill some hole, or at least hint at it. The self and the collective. Finding a balance between the need for...an individual's needs and the needs of the many. So many. Could a system like this one be duplicated? Scaled up? Globally? How could Family and the Elderly be integrated into this way of life? I need to ask. About family. Children. The end of life. It's a prison. The population reflects that. Twenty to forty years of age. Or younger? Older? Ten to ninety-five, probably. My faith has grown stronger. Tell me anything about this place, however fantastic, and I would believe it. I reject Sam's cynicism. There's room for both. In any family. In any home. A collection of selves. That sometimes put on shows. Show off. But this is done within Grace. Basking in a peaceful light. No want. Not just basic needs provided for, but every need, including the intangible, entangled desires and passions of the soul. Worked out. Exercised. Healthily. The Waste. The useless conflicts. The drudgery. The sloth. The envy. The greed. Eliminated. If this was an experiment to that end, in my mind, it was working. I committed myself to debating this point further with Sam. What to broach with Maggie? What to keep to myself? If this was a free society, would I be allowed outside the facility? I went up the ladder, no questions asked. Ask for the key to the padlock? Unlock the door on the roof? Walk out the main gate? Not a clue where that might be. This place is enclosed. It has that feeling. No obvious entrances or exits. The technological magic that makes my food/laundry bin appear and disappear in my room. Same kind of

gateway? To the outside? It looked like a foggy, thickly wooded area when I looked out from atop the ladder. Not much to see up there? Not much to see at ground level either?

What do you want when there is no want? Is that just a discomfort? Does this beginner's mind just need practice? When holes are filled, bridges are gapped, wants sated, do other cracks appear? Without the cracks, the light doesn't get in. For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. Conservation of matter. Conservation of spirit? There is a spirit here. Put it on the list. Ask about religion. God's grace. All the stuff leftover after you remove everything concrete. What's in a child's tear when you remove the electrolytes and salt. What kind of answer would I get to those questions? Hah!

I took an informal poll of my fellow park dwellers. I gave them more of a once over, almost to the point of rudely staring and gawking. Pre-teens looking much older. Men and Women in their 90s looking like forty somethings. How? I wish I could explain this non-verbal response I get all the time. To so many things. Not condescending but a "Don't you know?" about it. "If I even tried to explain, it would go badly. I don't see the point. Sorry about that." That look. That shrug. I've gotten used to it. All I can come up with is that this is a residual product of this system. A hyper state of health. Something in the food? Something in the mind? In the Heart? The problem of maturing and aging is mitigated. By technology? By simple practices? Was I feeling younger? Older? I can only say that overall, this stay has had a positive effect on my well-being. I feel great most of the time. Everyday depressions and anxieties? Suppressed. Present but subdued. A smile. A song. And a skull in your pocket. The skull is there, but it is your friend. The yin and yang, mostly yin? Mostly yang? No. Beyond that. A different way of framing it. Without effort, unconsciously, this new connection of dots and lines has seeped its way into my essence, and my non-essence. Logic fails me here. I can only hope whoever is reading this gets the easy joy and content resting place I have discovered. Do I need to do anything other than help out with the bugs, scratch out my impressions on this screen, and take strolls in the courtyard? I don't. Active or inactive, it's all the same. Get out of your own way. A cessation of self. A positive, freeing cessation of self. A frictionless mode of operation. That's all. If I've learned anything here, it's that existing in the present, here, and now, is the thing. All the rest? Not needed. Just a drag.

"I've been authorized to tell you about the launches you have heard. The rockets, as you call them. The missiles. The jet engine sounds. I'm sorry I have been so evasive with you. I'm sorry about the awkward, clunky way this has gone for you from the start. The lack of information. The way we've handled that. Withholding it. Lying, to put a point on it. Never a good thing, lying. But circumstances, global dynamics, our role in that, your role in that, has caused a bumbling, fluid series of bad decisions, each one leading to another. As much as you are blindly feeling your way through to the near future, so are we. Having to make it up as we go along, I'm afraid, and I wouldn't give us high marks for that."

"Well. I give you an A+ on this project. This facility. Every day, I'm more sold on its design, its harmony, its symmetry, its perfection."

"Not perfect, I'm afraid. Lots of work to do. But we have solved some problems. Found some elegant solutions."

"The launches?"

"Transport. Cargo. People. Connecting to our other facilities. Very fast. Very large. Very comfortable."

"Other facilities?"

"Yes."

"Not weapons?"

"No."

"Satellites?"

"We have a network of satellites, yes. And our vehicles facilitated their installation. But mostly our transportation system is just that. Transport."

"I don't know what to say. It's a lot. I wasn't ready for this. I can hardly believe it."

"Understandable. Would you like to go for a ride?"

"A ride?"

"Yes."

"In a rocket?"

"Well, they are not rockets. Are you getting used to the fact that there is a lot going on here? Technology? Science? Engineering? It's advanced."

"No, not really. You're telling me, you're showing me, major world altering exponential growth. Under the radar?"

"Exponential would imply a starting point that you are familiar with. And growth from there. It would be fairer to say that new leaps have been made. New creations unique to our time. Wholly singular conceptions and ideas."

"Really?"

"Yes."

"Way beyond my comprehension and understanding? Will I ever get it? Is it something I can learn about?"

"Consider yourself a kindergartener. Coming out of the womb, actually. Yes, understanding, communal understanding, is at the heart of what I'm talking about."

"Head spinning! Vertigo!"

"It's okay. Relax. About that ride."

"I'd be honored. When?"

"Now."

“What a trip. What a ship!”

“I apologize for not being more forthcoming about so many things.”

“Accepted. We have time. All the time we need.”

“Of all the people we could have shared this with, I’m glad it was you.”

“I feel like I know this, all this, deeply and intuitively.”

“Wisdom, unearned.”

“Yes.”

“Feels like a burden sometimes.”

“You feel it too?”

“It can’t be manipulated. Or conceived. It doesn’t grow. Or rest. Hard.”

“Your science can’t touch it.”

“That’s right.”

“Just ride it. Be transported by it. No need to question or analyze it.”

“Anywhere. Anytime. Always there. Like an itch sometimes. And like a caress.”

“A connection. Like the water in which we swim.”

“Like the gravity that holds the satellite in orbit.”

“Are you telling me a secret?”

“Am I confusing you? Causing a problem?”

“It makes me less afraid.”

“We should have told you about all this earlier. Or maybe not.”

“Maybe not. We are here now. Back from a wonderful trip. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

I need something. Rest. Less friction. Ions, negatively charged, washing over me. A way. Active or dormant? Sit. Forget everything. Embrace the melancholy. Find the logic. Make an effort. Consciously. Take the picture out of its frame. Reject it. Deny it. Escape it. Press. Without fear or anxiety. Unaffected by time or space. Lose your practice. Turn off the machine. Turn off your heart and age. The slow disease of metamorphosis. Bile extracted. Bothered and distracted. No conclusions. No knowledge. No language. No form. Unanswered prayers. Unheard laments. No spirit. No matter. No tension. Nothing opposite. No fissure. No fusion. No action. No light. Holes black and bridges gapped. Comforts disturbed. Beginner entrapped.

On the ground now. Off the ladder. Clear skies. Open fields. Doors and walls absent. Running. Yet captive. Without direction or purpose. Nauseous and flush. Blinded and agitated. Detached and alone. Faithless. Ugly. Neverending. Singular. Unbalanced. Groping. A line. A phrase. A script. A costume. A role. An entrance.

I shout into the void. I do. Me. I am not nameless. I am on a stage in the spotlight. Cold. Separate. No one watching or listening. Stuttering. A fool. I am not a player. I am abandoned. A performance requires an audience. Engaged. Enraptured. I cannot dream. Or sing. Or feel my breath. The dance floor is empty and unscuffed.

Improvisation can not take place in a vacuum. It can not be conjured. It floats atop a deep and boundless sea. Of all that was before. Of what is to come. It's a game played, and without a structure, you have no game. It's a conversation, and without the other, you have no conversation. Core elements. Understanding. Tight strictures. Bold traditions. Broad histories. Without form, there is no improvisation.

I have no conceit. No vanity. No air. For my participation, a confidence is required. An attitude. A desire. A skill set. A mask. Laughter and tears, pretended. Offered to a community. Whispered. Unpronounced. Gestures ill-defined. Yet ordered, one, two, three.

It will never happen. I will never join in. I will never start. I will never feel its power. I will take the food, but not taste it. I will enter the space, but not face it. I will sculpt the object, but not place it. I will see the line, but not trace it. I will recognize it, but not embrace it.

Twenty-Four

Maggie said she had a letter for me. Handwritten. Unopened. From my friends. She was not sure when it was dated, as it had passed through many parties before being given to her. She said she wanted to meet with me after I had read it. She said she was sure many questions would be answered, by the letter and her, over the next few days. She said to get back to her when I was ready.

I wanted to transcribe the letter here for many reasons. For the record, if this was a record being kept by anyone. To absorb it fully, so as not to miss anything. To show my friends reading these posts that I had received it and studied it. It was the first clear message I had gotten from the outside, and I felt it was important to include it here.

Hello friend,

We are not sure where to begin. So much has happened since your abduction. Great change has occurred. Unexpected, momentous changes no one could have predicted. It's beyond anything we could have hoped for, and so quickly! A confluence of events that you were lost in. So much. So fast. All at once.

We were able to locate and connect to the laptop you write on soon after you were missing. As you know, the hackers, the network and computer experts we have working for us are magicians. Their use of AI and other software and hardware tools is miraculous. They did a wide search and found the first thing you wrote.

"Here's to the lie that the world was made for other than one's perfect pleasure."

We knew only a few people would have used that. We time-stamped it, eliminated the few other references to this, and pinpointed your location and your network's I.P. From that point on, we have been reading and distributing everything you have written around the globe. You are in a densely forested area a few hours by car from your home. Inaccessible. And with everything else going on, we decided that a rescue operation was not possible. We felt it best to keep glued to your laptop, and let things play out. You seemed to be doing well, and we had, have, other critically important activities to attend to.

You received the video clips we sent. And our other messages, and that has lifted our spirits. It was the best we could do. From your writing, it seems you saw them. It's everything you think it would be, and more.

Our Movement, combined with others, reached a tipping point. We hope the first clip showed that. Everyone on the street! Everyone! A global demonstration of power and solidarity never before seen. We were making great progress before you were taken, but in the time after, it multiplied to a critical mass that could not be suppressed. Truly historic. You were lost in that storm, I'm afraid, but we were with you. We are reading your posts, and their publication fuels the fire. Opposing sides had no choice but to sit down and talk. Negotiate. In good faith. That's what we hope you saw in the second clip. All the important players, in a room, working things out. It was a dream! This is all a dream. And where you are. It's beyond what anyone could have hoped for. When they presented your facility and other facilities, in a film at the

U.N., we were beside ourselves. That's what you saw in the third clip. The World's introduction to whole new technologies, sources of power, administrative concepts that we wouldn't dare to imagine. We knew it was real because of what you were writing to us. Aghast. Floored. Trying to keep our cool. Trying to negotiate. With who?

That's the craziest thing, how out of the blue this was for us and them. All the Us-es and all the Them-s. Out of the blue, completely unexpectedly, a group unknown to anyone dropped a metaphorical Nuke and obliterated the conflicts and tensions and demonstrations and movements and agendas and policies and all of it, with one stroke. Here was a solution. A way forward. A system. One that overtook the staggering and transcendent events that were occurring. They say they have been working behind the scenes, secretly, for years. Developing all kinds of novel approaches to energy, science, technology, engineering, and governance. A loose network of unaffiliated collectives. Unlimited resources and know how. And how! How? Are they from the future? How could they have kept this a secret? Why? Since we have begun to talk, they have been more than transparent. We have every faith that you are reading this letter.

Everything they are telling us is everything we have worked and hoped for. Everyone provided for. No money. No hierarchy. And they back it up. Everyone agrees and is working towards implementing their initiatives without delay. They say they are not quite ready for the full roll out they had planned, but came forward now because of world events. Events you help shape, my friend.

You are the only one they took. They say they needed someone to see it for themselves, to verify their claims and promises. And you are doing that. There is a trust that is emerging. How can we put this? You are the vanguard of a new reality. Could it be? They want to start inviting more guests into their facilities. It won't happen overnight, but with a bit of cooperation, eventually, everyone, everyone on Earth, will have the opportunity to live and work just as you are now. And you seem to be thriving. I cannot stress the importance of your role in all of this. You validate what they are telling us, in real time. From what you are writing, from what they are telling us, it seems possible. It seems inevitable.

There's still so much we don't know. Hidden wealth. Hidden knowledge. Like a bolt from the sky. All the concessions, accords, covenants, agreements, compacts, and understandings. Are they happening moment to moment as we speak because the powers that be were aware? Who, ultimately, is behind this? Why was this work kept so under wraps? These questions need to be answered, but the real promise of real change, the lifting away of poverty and suffering on a global scale, seems like the necessary focus now. We will make a new world together with the help of our mysterious benefactors. We did it. They say they want to give us the keys to the castle. They have built a road to a new society, and we will take it. Our work, our movement, not just ours, but people everywhere have come together and uncloaked a grand sustainable machine, a system that allows for the perfect pleasure you are so fond of dreaming about to flower.

We are busy working out the details of a smooth and peaceful transition into this new space. The widespread unconditional cooperation that is blooming encourages us. I can't express our excitement. Our joy. Soon we will be together, living a new life.

I want to write down everything I know about our origins alongside my speculations. Other's speculations as well. Mythmaking, legend building, documenting history, stories shared between generations, all this was something rejected, ejected from our culture intentionally. I will now try to summarize our saga here, culled from bits of fact and filled in with conjecture. Accounts of this nature are integral to many societies across the globe. Now that our group is quickly becoming more widely known, I'm sure someone twenty years from now will want to know about where and how we began. How we developed our technologies and way of life. I don't give this much thought. None of us do. Is there something remembered? Yes, but very little, I'm afraid. This story will be incomplete, much of it guessed at.

A few like-minded individuals with an idea, a dream. How far back in time did it begin? The adults who raised me, and the adults who raised them. Probably a few generations before that. I think this because of how far we have come. Much of what we have now was in place as I matured. What was I told as a child? What makes this difficult is that memory itself, the act of remembering, was submerged, hidden, and not a part of our experience. Always beginning. Always present. That was the focus. The majority of our thoughts and actions directed at here and now. This was foundational. A big part of the first idea. Shedding the past. Moment to moment. I know this to be true, because of how we live today. Fables. Stories. Passed onto future generations? From what little I know about other circles, these things were, for them, foundational and omnipresent. Not for me. Not for us.

They had built something. A community. Just one place. It must have been. Was it where I live today? I don't know that. There is so much I don't know. I didn't know as a child how isolated, insulated, secretive, and separate we were. I am only beginning to understand that now, now that we are quickly becoming a member of the planetary community. I can't compare my experience to that. To other communities. Naive. Ignorant. This concerns me now. It didn't then. Very little did. My early years were filled with simple pleasures. Small discoveries. Tiny wonders. A vigorous imagination. I believe this was the cross beam of their construction. An intentional, and local, pursuit of simplicity and clarity, bathed in light. Not just the light generated by our new, clean, abundant source of energy, but the light in our hearts, our spirits. One abundance would feed another, perpetually. A faith that this practice would minimize, if not eliminate, unnecessary pain and suffering.

It must have started from that source of energy. From that, all things flowed. I am sure of it. I was told that the energy yields much. I can imagine the breakthrough. The trial and error leading to more and more efficiencies, more and

more particles combining and sparking. An ember to a flame. A small group of like-minded individuals with an idea, a dream.

Communication. The flow of ideas. The nurturing of dreams. There must have been plans. Written down. Blueprints. Schematics. Equations. Codified. Encrypted. A secret exchange. Repeated and perfected. Why was it secret? Why are we only now presenting ourselves? As I grew older I came to understand that this day, these days we are living now, would come to pass. That it was best to stay out of sight, in the wilderness of our world, until we felt ready to engage in a sustainable exchange. Selfishly hoarding our secrets? Not that. A preparation. A maturation. Methodical. A method. A Practice. Until now. A Now we did not initiate. Would we have ever felt ready? If not for the present tumult, we would still be developing. I believe that. I believe we will get through this, what we are now attempting, as unprepared as we are.

Our first facility must have been small and rudimentary. Our population growth slow and gradual. Our technological innovations hitting one dead end after another. As well as our attempts to govern ourselves. What others call the Government. Bureaucracy. Politics. Power. From my skewed perspective, we don't have these things. We must have been steadfast about our approach to this. Our society and its rules. Our secrecy. I think it's as simple as that. Rigor. About the ideas we cared about. And how those ideas were put to use. Shown, not told. An example set. Role models. Built into its design and purpose. So much of our world lies under the surface. So much tacitly understood. Because of what I do, I have a limited understanding of other cultures and societies. Most of us would not be able to make these comparisons and contrasts. Most of us are unconcerned as to how we got here. Our origins. I think we would benefit by folding in a bit of history and ancestry into our batter. Maybe now we will. Inevitable. Imperative. Maybe.

I'm not sure what I can add to this brief and vague summary. An anecdote or two? A fictional speculation about that time. That beginning. Something specific and detailed that would show that initiative. A false memory elucidating what I think happened. A catalyst contrived for your pleasure. My pleasure. Your understanding. My understanding.

A laboratory. An atomic reaction. Controlled. An impractical experiment for its own sake. A chat over a meal. How to scale it up. How to harness its power. In plain sight at first. At some university. A decision made to announce its failure and abandonment.

"Why do we need to tell anyone about this?"

"We don't."

"We should develop this on our own."

"A secret. Easy enough."

“A secret society. Our own ideas. About many things. Not just energy.”

“A new way to exchange these ideas, as well.”

“New. Nothing old.”

“Initial conditions. A beginning. A way. A flow.”

“It already has begun.”

Maybe that was the first conversation. How it began. Like-minded scientists, and experimenters, playing with ideas of secrecy and existence. It would be an effort freely exerted, the covert nature of their clandestine plan. Another lab. Other resources. Other connections. Masked. Veiled. A game of hide and seek. Hiding discovery and seeking information. Sabbaticals. Retirements. Contrived disabilities. New identities.

“Off the grid. I’m sure you understand. Take care of yourself. I’ll be in touch”

No one the wiser. More labs. Labs with living quarters. Families bound together communally. Bounty. From the energy. New constructions. Machines. Quantum computing. Hydroponic greenhouses. Cellular regenerative processes. Exponential growth. And a new quiet, centered, uncluttered spirit guiding it all. Intuitive acumen. A detached postulation. A letting go. Desire released. A supposition that nothing should be clung to. And the more that was practiced, the more they would thrive.

Travel. Communication. Connection. Minimized. Localized. Compartmentalized. Reduced. Expanding out in ways unimagined. A new Imagination revealed. Nourished.

Expansion and growth. But also plateaus. Accepted. Recognized. Rested upon. The need for constant change dissolved, melted away. I think what I’m trying to describe here on this page now did take time. Took time because Time itself was reframed. Faded. When the past is discarded and the future is blinded, Time is less. Timeless.

“What will we do today?”

“Be still and listen to the music of the spheres.”

“Eat.”

“Actively do nothing.”

“Rest.”

“Play.”

“Dream.”

“Make something that floats, and watch it disappear.”

“Some maintenance. On a machine or two.”

“Prune.”

“Study. Investigate something I’m curious about.”

“Shout.”

“What about?”

“Your snout.”

“Shut your spout.”

“I’ve been coming up with a game we can play. A bit like what we are doing now. It has to do with words and gestures. Poetry and dance. I have some ideas. Some rules. A basic format and structure. I’d like to try it out with a few of you. See if it can be something we can develop and enjoy together.”

“Ok.”

“Let’s play.”

“Today?”

“Today.”

Twenty-Five

Haiku

5

7

5

One perfect pleasure
Now together enjoyed
Why the world was made

Games Words and Gestures
Amusing and intricate
Playfully nonsense

Insectarium
Buzz crawl flutter and slither
Helping the plants grow

ChalkBoard Ideas
Crafted and implemented
For your benefit

Beautifully light filled
Gardens fountains tree and flower
Peace Community

New Community
Networked thriving emerging
Society remodeled

Only Theater
Can forge a new existence
On stage the actor

Walking not running
Relaxed activities are
Always welcome here

Simple poetry
Spare and floating in Aether
Freely exchanging

Questioning wisdom
Confirming one self blindly
Faith in a darkness

Providing all needs
Cooperating fully
With a smile and song

Information gift
Knowledge without prejudice
Ire and hate missing

Syllables counted
Basic ancient forms prolonged
If only to tickle

I can write and scratch
Pressing keys and clicking pads
Letters into words

Dancing for a crowd
Awake aware and alive
Teasing a changing

Easy to compose
Hard to lift it away from
Chaos Entropy

Strings Webs Grids Bubbles
Loosely stuck to each other
Making bigger ones

We are us and them
You and I are always here
Now Future and Past

Magical gifting
Mysteriously appears
Benefit and aid

"Not bad."

"Thanks. Haiku. Part of your game?"

"Short answer is yes."

"Long answer?"

"The player can change the form for no reason at any time. Short verse is a starting point, but the game can morph into longer forms. Or just a word. One of the objects of the game is to confuse your opponent. Or partner. The other players are, in essence, neither of those things - opponent or partner. Loosening connections to the point of not being a connection is part of it. And that can change, depending."

"Confusing."

"That's the point."

"Do you keep score? Is there a winner?"

"Loosely. Players gain standing and certain allowances and abilities the more they play. You get better and grow, and beginners are handicapped in that way. Loosely. Loose, not tight. If you get that, you are on your way to understanding, or embracing a lack of understanding. Sorry to be abstract and antithetical, but there it is."

"Ok. Short verse. There also seems to be gestures and facial expressions involved. The exchange seems almost telepathic at times."

"Telepathy. Interesting. In one another's mind? Not in any supernatural way, but in an instinctual, experienced way. I would say that the play borders on telepathy. I know what you are thinking. I can guess. That is part of the gameplay. Physical gestures. Face, hands, and body. As important as the words. It's a dance between the two."

"Dance. What you are describing seems more akin to what I would call performance art. Creating a moment with your mind and body, for its own sake. Art."

"Yes, performance art. That's good. That's why your whole show thing, putting on a play, a performance....it works. It enhances the experience. More things can happen. Thank you for that."

"So that has made it better? I'm glad."

"Better? Now you are drifting. Better is not a good choice of words."

"Oops."

"To understand the game, you need to shed your logic. In an elemental fashion. We play to shake off what we think we know. To let go of preconceived notions. If there is what you call an object to the game, that is it. The most respected players find this. Or lose this. Or both."

"Tell me more about the gestures, the physical part of it."

"Experienced players have a large reservoir to dip into. Thousands of nuanced variable signals to choose from. Let's use that word, signal, for a moment. You may signal back to what has happened, or signal forward to what may come. Signals can be newly created. A version or mix of known signals, or something entirely new. Beginners have a smaller set, but can be creative in their use."

"If I didn't know any better, I would say that a bit of showing off is involved here. Not only are you trying to confuse the other participants, you are trying to impress them as well."

"As long as it's done with an appropriate amount of humility and modesty, yes, I would say that's true. Envy of another player's ability is frowned upon. You may feign envy in a humorous way, but in the game's context, that's tough to pull off. I would refrain from this as a beginner."

"So, game play. How do you start? Are there formalities involved?"

"Formalities?"

"Some set, traditional way the game begins?"

"The way it begins is as important as the way it ends, and regarding the confusion, the best players start in a completely novel way."

"Is there a referee? A judge? Someone overseeing the game play?"

"No. I do remember one game where the player gently mimicked this. Very subtle, but brilliant."

"So how does it start? Who starts?"

"It's spontaneous. To make it work within the framework of your show, we decided that some beginners would take the stage first."

"So words first? Just say anything? Gestures first? Just do anything?"

"An exchange commences. Words and gestures. A mix."

"You're performing?"

"In a subdued way, yes."

"Well. What if I wanted to confuse by being a bit more over the top?"

"Risky. But allowed."

"How risky?"

"Another part of this game we haven't touched on is the flow of it. From one game to the next. Within each game. The flow. The transitions. How one thing leads to another. Part of the overall object. I would say the game lives in these spaces, or non-spaces, if that makes any sense."

"Well, not making sense...the fun of it."

"Well said."

"So a beginner throws out some words and gestures spontaneously. An improvisation or prepared?"

"You prepare by remembering past games. Maybe not the last one, but the past. And you're thinking about what might occur in the near future. And, importantly, you're trying to make the whole thing, all the games, all the play within one game, flow seamlessly together. A stream. A confluence. Most important thing. The flow."

"Ok. Then what?"

"An exchange occurs. Between one or more players. A fluid chain of events is constructed. Language fails me. That's close, though. A flow. An exchange."

"This continues or doesn't continue, depending on the gameplay. I've seen games abruptly end for no apparent reason."

"That's it! I think you are getting a handle on this."

"Am I? Could I try it? Could I start with one of my Haikus?"

"And what physical gestures would you employ?"

"Something I've seen another player use?"

"Ok. But it would be best to have a basic understanding of what those gestures signify."

"So there is a thread of confusion and spontaneous creation and a thread of skill and understanding as well?"

"Yes, there is. Very good."

"I'd like to participate. In the show space."

"Let me speak to my friends and see how that can happen. For now being a part of the audience would be good. I can teach you a few common gestures before the next game. That way, slowly, you can better understand what's going on."

"Or be confused by it, which would be good as well?"

"Voila!"

"Hello, Maggie. The letter. Thank you for giving it to me unopened. I transcribed it into my own writings and I am ready to talk about it. Are my writings being saved?"

"Yes, they are."

"Thank you."

"You're welcome."

"I'm a guest, the first guest, at Shangri-La."

"That's one way to put it. Do you feel like a guest at Shangri-La?"

"I do."

"Good."

"And you plan on populating this and other facilities with more and more people. Creating a new society. A new way of life. For everyone."

"Sounds a bit too ambitious when you put it like that."

"How would you put it?"

"Yes, our plan is to invite more and more people into our facilities."

"Who is here now? They recognize me. I don't recognize anyone. Was I the only one taken?"

"Volunteers. Pioneers."

"Not prisoners?"

"No, not prisoners. You're famous. Who wouldn't recognize you? Yes, you are the only one who was taken."

"I was taken because of my fame. My family's standing. The work I've been doing."

"All of the above."

"You needed someone like me to validate and testify to the real existence of this facility. Other facilities. Will my role be as some kind of ambassador? Helping you promote and implement your systems and ideas?"

"Well, that would be lovely. But it would be your choice. I wouldn't have suggested that role. But you did. Would you like to do that?"

"Let me consider it. It's a lot to take in. What you have. What you want to share. What you propose."

"Frankly, we are not ready. World events necessitated an early rollout. We are years, perhaps generations, away from fully integrating our facilities, our work, our ideas into the mainstream. This is why the beginning of your stay here was so messed up. There was a bit of in-house squabbling. Indecision. Bad choices. On top of the mass rejection of the status quo. We felt an urgency and fumbled through a faulty initiative. Not proud. Ashamed."

"Let's move forward. Being abducted was...let's begin again."

"Okay."

"How did you keep all this so secret?"

"Lucky, I guess. We were careful. We played hide to everyone's seek. We have a good group. And lots of resources."

"Unlimited resources it seems like. The wealth. The knowledge. How?"

"A lot of good faith cooperation between a loose collective of prosperous, hands off benefactors. That in combination with some breakthroughs, energy wise, engineering wise, science wise."

"Talk about that. What powers this place? The vehicles. Beyond what is known and understood by a long shot. Quantum leap?"

"I think you should speak with Sam about all of this. It wasn't an accident you met her. She's a lead here. A founder. Some of her ideas made this all happen."

"Why isn't that surprising? She's amazing. Never met anyone like her. She is not like anyone else here, and a bit of a contrarian. She has her doubts about this."

"This is Shangri-La. I believe that. But it's not without its flaws. Its problems. I respect Sam's point of view. We all do."

"She fears there is a loss of self here. That something unique in each of us is lost."

"That's fair. One of our hopes is that your presence could correct that. That your ideas and beliefs could be integrated and blossom here. That our progress and evolution could include your spirit, your ideas, your self."

"You give me too much credit. I'm just a young man with an undisciplined, problematic idealism and not a clue where to take my next step. Fumbling in the dark. Occasionally, a light comes on."

"We feel there is a lot you can offer us. We hope our relationship continues to grow."

"It will. My friends and I are excited about the future. They say that much is happening in the way of agreements and accords around the world. And so quickly. Is this loose collective you speak of somehow responsible for this? This new global covenant emerging?"

"Short answer is yes."

"The long answer?"

"The long answer I am not privy to. I can say that the ideas at play here have been around for a while, held dear and kept alive by a networked web of secret societies and clandestine entities. It sounds creepy and dishonest like that. I would not describe what is happening and what led to it as creepy and dishonest. Hidden. Masked. Veiled. Fermenting."

"I'm not going to judge your decision making and development. I'm thrilled in the here and now. Will it work? Is your endgame to provide for everyone's needs?"

"Yes, it is. We strongly feel our tech, our science, our systems can greatly enhance the quality of life for everyone on Earth. In time."

"Children. Elderly. Families. The sick and disabled. Not a part of this facility. All that. What about that?"

"This is a pilot program. Beta test. We have a lot of work to do and we were not planning on unveiling any of this just yet. But the global unrest and political upheaval warranted action on our part. Everyone is included in our plans. Children, the elderly, the sick and infirm. The way you think of them, what they are, how they are, and how they are managed currently, that will change radically. For the better, I hope. Children and the elderly will be more independent. Families will work more closely together. That's putting it simply, and it's not simple. There will be challenges and risks. Our hope is that hunger, disease, suffering...these things will be greatly reduced, and over time become something else. Not the oppressive weight they are today."

"I've always dreamed of this. I've always believed a radically different way of life was possible. A peaceful world where we can grow and seek pleasure in our own way. Is that why you chose me as your first guest?"

"Yes, it was."

"There's a wish for Shangri-La in everyone's heart."

"You quote that. You recognize that. You fight for that. That wish. You do it freely and unconditionally, unbound by fear or pessimism. And famous, too. Who better to be our first guest?"

"I'm honored. And humbled. Thank you. I look forward to a plentiful and more just world. What's next?"

"What would you like to be next?"

"I'd like to remain here. With Sam. With the bugs. I'd like to be informed, but that isn't important. I'd like to discuss further what my role as ambassador would be like."

"Your role as ambassador could be anything you want it to be."

"You trust me."

"Yes. Trust. That's the word. That, more than anything, will make this work."

"Okay. My friends know I'm well. You are working closely with them. I will see them soon?"

"Yes. Won't be long."

"Let's talk again soon."

"Okay."

Interview Part Five

“So, you introduced yourselves to the world with a presentation at the U.N. You began a dialogue with various interests around the world and injected yourselves into the middle of all of it. All of it being all kinds of major changes, conflict, and suffering. All the while your facility maintained the status quo and your guest began giving impromptu performances that included many of your volunteers. For me, there is a disconnect there. Your lack of involvement. Your continued isolation. As if nothing was happening anywhere else. Can you speak to that?”

“Why didn’t our volunteers get shipped off to some conflict somewhere?”

“Ok, yes. Why didn’t they?”

“That would have defeated the purpose of the entire enterprise. We planned to invite others into our way of life, not the other way around. It was decided that the first thing we would do, at our facility, was to bring in a few dozen of our guest’s friends. Continue the beta test. That’s all it was. A beta test. Still is in many ways.”

“Feeling your way.”

“Fumbling in the dark.”

“And so slowly compared to the quickening happening globally.”

“I am isolated. We are insulated. My knowledge of other cultures, and other societies, is limited. I do know that we can be rather methodical. From the outside, it must seem very slow, like we are not even moving sometimes. This is mostly due to our decision-making and the way we accomplish tasks and take action, across the board. We’re never in a hurry. We certainly weren’t then despite the circumstances. I was frustrated with this at times. I pushed for more action. I wanted us to move forward with all the things we were endlessly chatting about. Never formally. Without commitment.”

“If everyone is involved all the time, I can see where that would bog down and become something beyond frustrating.”

“Yes, very much so. But look at where we are today. Hard to second guess how we went about it.”

“How you went about it. Were you worried at all about his performances? That they might have some negative impact? That they might disrupt things in a way that would hurt you?”

“No, not at all. It was new, and we love novelty. The unexpected. The Theater. An audience. Watching a performance for pleasure. Not a part of our community. Everyone embraced it right away and saw in it something that was missing. It filled a space we had neglected. And we were encouraged by how much his ideas when presented in this way complemented our own. We knew he was a kindred spirit, and he was invited for that reason. That he would bring something this delicious to our table was beyond our expectations. Magical.”

“Magic. That word, again. Your world seems so grounded. Fixed in reality and the present tense. Nothing beyond the senses or our dimension is ever addressed, acknowledged, or spoken of. Here. Now. Nothing else. Yet - ”

“Yet we know that there is much more than that and that it surrounds us, influences us, directs us, nourishes us. There is no need to speak of it. Do you talk about the Sun? The Air? Why speak of things that are beyond Language’s ability to define it?”

“So you just say the word magic, and leave it at that?”

“Most of the time, yes.”

“What did you say? That you keep things, all things, at a distance? Each other? Ideas? Feelings? Not closely held. At a distance.”

“Yes, the way a performer graces the stage. Away, separate, from their audience. The song of a bird echoing from afar. A photon from another galaxy grazing your cheek.”

“There is science about this. Strange attractors at a distance? I don’t know.”

“I’m sure there is. I don’t know either. Magic to me.”

“Is there anything you hold close?”

“That I would be comfortable talking about with you? No.”

“Fair enough. So it’s there, but it isn’t.”

“Now you’re speaking my language.”

“Am I? I don’t even know what I’m saying.”

“I know what you are saying.”

“It’s hidden, but occasionally revealed.”

“All will be revealed if you stop looking for it.”

“I think I mentioned that I read his account of that time. One of his last entries describes a performance. Quite a spectacle. Rehearsed. Well attended. Sam was involved. Do you remember this?”

“Oh yes, the first one like that?”

“There were more?”

“Yes, the performances continued. Ones he produced and ones he didn’t. They had come a long way from the simple improvisations he started with. Music. Dancing. Poetry. Elaborate. Engaging. I loved it. Everyone did. I attended most of them. I still do when he invites me. What do you say? The magic of the theater? It’s there. If it’s anywhere, it’s there.”

“His friends were there as well? Things continued like this? More and more people invited to live with you?”

“That’s right. We continued. Slowly. Gradually. Methodically. We both became ambassadors, of sorts. Representatives. Traveled a bit. Mostly we stayed home. And played. Even now, I can’t speak to what happened elsewhere.”

“My understanding is that much of what you and he have described took place all around the world. Word spread. That wasn’t you?”

“I guess. I don’t know. Keep in mind the localized nature of our way of life. Independent. Autonomous. Communications? The Big Share? Different from how you might see it or understand it.”

“This fascinates me. There aren’t millions of electronic messages zipping through millions of wires. News. Art. Globally distributed this and that. It’s just not in the makeup.”

“More and more of that I would say. A lot less of it then, to be sure. Yes, words, thoughts, and ideas traveled, but more like smoke signals than speed-of-light telepathy.”

“Telepathy. My interactions with your communities. The people. It does seem like telepathy sometimes, the way they interact. Is it? Telepathy?”

“Interesting. I can see where it would seem like that to you. It is a practice. Trying to guess what you are thinking. Subtle cues becoming conveyances. It’s not telepathy in any supernatural, metaphysical sense, but we reach for it in our natural world. Our sights and sounds. How to tell you without telling you. How to show you without showing you. A craft. A skill set. The way we communicate all the time. It’s more for our amusement than for any practical reason.”

“Like flirting.”

“Flirting?”

“Mating. Sex. Pairing. Romance.”

“Oh. Maybe? I don’t know about that. All that is very different for us. And I am not comfortable talking about it.”

“That’s ok. We won’t. You practice a kind of real-world, natural telepathy. A game for you. And everything’s a game.”

“Most everything.”

“What isn’t a game?”

“From your perspective?”

“Sure. Yes. From my perspective.”

“I’d just be guessing.”

“You love guessing.”

“Got me there. Making sure everyone is provided for, physically, mentally, and spiritually. Not a game. Making sure everyone has ample time and opportunity to play games. Not a game. A priority.”

“How you made that happen and how you continue to make that happen. Truly magic.”

“Yes, magic.”

Twenty-Six

"By replicating, in a controlled fashion, the process that powers the sun, it is possible to obtain incredible amounts of energy in a safe and environmentally clean way."

"I read that somewhere. That's it."

"Fusion. So you combine atoms and release energy. Rather than split the atom, like fission."

"That's right. We do that."

"Just a dream, I thought."

"Everything new was begun in a dream."

"Sanora Babb, I think. There it is."

"I love that! The big bang? A dream first."

"Yes. Everything. Everything new. Lots of new things here."

"So there's one humongous reactor somewhere powering everything?"

"No. Lots of smaller reactors."

"Can I see one?"

"Not much to look at. A box. Like a fridge."

"So everything is powered this way? The vehicles?"

"Yes. The transports."

"Food?"

"Hydroponic. Once you have a clean, unlimited supply of energy, it makes all kinds of things possible. Efficiencies are attained. All kinds of innovation. Self-cleaning environments. Vibrant ecosystems. Plentiful food, water and materials. Et cetera."

"Materials. What is my room made of?"

"That's new. Strong. Light. Easy to make."

"You make it all sound like a walk in the park."

"Breakthroughs lead to breakthroughs. Practice makes perfect. You learn. You test. Things get easier. And there's a lot of clever people around here. And they work well together."

"You being one of those people?"

"You flatter me."

"Maggie said you were a leader. A founder."

"I'm not sure about that. I have my doubts about all this, but one of the things I like is that there are no leaders, no founders, no board. I do what I like, when I like. I don't manage. I don't nag. I don't hover. And I don't blah blah blah, like I am now."

"Thanks for indulging me."

"Oh, more? Great."

"How long has this been developing? And so out of view. How?"

"I have no idea. I'm insulated from all that, thankfully. I can answer science questions. I can try. All that, the politics, the history, the social structure. No idea. What did you say? The place runs itself? It does. Preferable to the alternative."

"So there is autonomy here. I would debate that goes against your criticism about the loss of self. You say you do what you want, when you want? Does everybody?"

"Got me there. That is true. I still see the self at risk somehow. I don't have all the answers. I have questions, too. And my big question has to do with the loss of self. Maybe it's me. You don't seem bothered by it. You think you've found Shangri-La! Hah!"

"Maybe I should be bothered. I hear you. I'm open to what you have to say."

"I'd rather not talk about that. Next science, tech question."

"Water?"

"We can make it. It is a clean by-product of the fusion process. That process is not exactly how you would think about it. It's beyond what is commonly thought of as how it would work."

"How so?"

"We figured out a way to have the whole thing circle back on itself, making it more efficient, more powerful, safer, and more sustainable. Ten fold. More than what we thought was possible. Accidents happen. Happy accidents. Even a blind squirrel gets a nut sometimes."

"Really?"

"We combine atoms. They yield energy. Cleanly. The details are....I could try but it wouldn't go well. Trust me. It works. We use it. We innovate. We don't innovate when we don't need to. We strive for simplicity. If you think of the whole thing as a simple process, you are pretty much there. Enjoy the fruits of our labor and go take a stroll in the Courtyard."

"Are there classes? Schools? Can I attend? How are ideas exchanged? How are they developed?"

"I've known you for much too long now, and that's the first decent question you've asked."

"I am a blind squirrel. Get over it."

"All that happens in a very informal way. Nothing is compulsory. No teacher-student relationships per se. This freedom is beneficial and has led to some of the breakthroughs and innovations that seem implausible to you. I believe that."

"So you could teach me? Informally?"

"Must I?"

"No."

"Good. Play with the bugs. Teach yourself."

"Okay."

"You need to let go of the urgency. The desire. The insatiable curiosity. It blinds you, blocks you, in a way. Your heart is in the right place, just going at the wrong speed."

"But...."

"Things will go more quickly when they need to, more slowly when they need to. You will learn things. You will grow. Don't worry."

"If I didn't worry, I wouldn't feel alive."

"It's killing you. Stop."

The Sun. Our ability to mimic its power here on Earth. When did I first learn about this? Can I remember it? Would writing about it here spark a memory? Memories? Nostalgia. To reminisce. It's frowned upon. We don't do it. I want to do it. Here. Now. On this page. Maybe I will discover something. Something I've lost. Something I never had. We have everything because of the Sun. And we have the Sun in our pocket. We've captured it. All that we have and all that we are stems from this. Our advancements, our abundance. Did I ask about it as a child? Yes, I think I did.

I was brought up in the way we all were and still are, in an environment quite different from here. Smaller structures housing about a dozen adults and about fifty children. Within a cluster of about ten buildings neatly arranged within a much larger perimeter than we have here. Each home, yes, home, that's the word I think, completely independent and self-sustaining, yet loosely connected and working together as a community. A neighborhood. A village. I slept and ate in the same home and had supervision from the same adults most of the time, but interacted with the community freely. Without formality. Independent. From a very young age. Contributing. Learning. Taught to teach myself. Whatever education seemed engaging to me. Free to choose my own path, and my own activities. Nothing was my own. No possessions. No toybox. Clothes. Jewelry. Tools and utensils. None of this was thought of as private. Shared space. Shared dreams. I was expected...wrong word, expectation...complete voluntary participation in all things, a tacit understanding of this, unspoken. My natural, easy way of being. Our way.

I was closest to the dozen adults who watched over us in our home, but all the adults in our community were tasked with our upbringing. The nurturing and support were uniform and plentiful. I was free to discover my independence, the autonomy I humbly carry with me now. Always with an absolute deference to the community. Understood by me without being told. Before speech.

Was I seven or eight? Celebrating one's birth, celebrating one's biological family, one's individuality, one's unique contributions, and desires...not present. Not needed. So to say I was seven or eight is an approximation at best. We were playing in the sunshine. As we always did. Play is a good word for what we all did most of the time. It was particularly sunny that day. That's my memory. Warm. Bright. Alive. I asked about the Sun. It's light. It's heat. It's permanence. How did it do that? What was it doing? How did it start? Was it always this way? Hot? Blinding? Can I go there?

I was told the Sun was a star. A very old star. Its fire was burning long before any of us existed. A fiery blaze. Elements reacting to one another. Combining. And within that combining were explosions. Tiny ones. Gentle bubbles popping, releasing the energy that I felt on my face. The energy needed to grow. The plants. The Earth. Our planet. Very far away, the Sun. No one has been there. Anyway, if you did, you'd get burned. Ouch!

I wanted to know about the elements. The Sun was large but the elements were tiny? Bouncing? Dancing? Hugging? Melting? It all must be melting all the time. How does it stay together? Why is it a ball? It was very large and very far away. We were dancing with it all the time. Our home, our planet, dancing with the Sun. The same force, the same attraction making us a ball, that force held the Sun together. All the tiny things and big things spinning and traveling, causing this force to hold all things together and keep them apart. An invisible force. If I could keep quiet, really quiet and still, I might be able to feel it. We don't feel it like the rays or the heat, but it's there all the time. Like a breath. Like a sense. Like a dream. It will always be there. I asked if we might be able to figure out a way to travel there, to reach the

Sun, safely. To scoop a bit of it up into a bucket and bring it home. To have. To play with. Without getting burned. No, it's too far away and much too hot, but we have figured something out. Something magical. We can make the Sun. Conjure a tiny scoop. Put it in a bucket. A box. And we can play with it. Use it in so many ways. For our benefit, our sustenance, our pleasure.

This was magical. A tiny scoop of the Sun. Where? Can I see it? How did we do that? We have been asking about the Sun for a long time. Discovering the way it works. It plays. Many smart people have played with this like a puzzle. Putting pieces together in a way of understanding. A big picture from crooked bits. Slowly. Mistakes. Conundrums. Coming clear. Like you play with puzzles. Like that. Eventually, the tiny scoop appeared. Then it disappeared. Then it appeared again. Many times. Until we were able to keep it still. Capture it. Care for it. Support it. Over time that tiny scoop began to support us. Live with us. Help us. You can't see it, but I can show you where it lives.

I was led to a place on the edge of our community that I knew nothing about. Because I was a child? Because it was not safe for a child? I don't know that. I know that this was the first time I was aware of it. Shown it. A place filled with machines and contraptions. Humming. Buzzing. Reflecting. Churning. Active. It was magic. Truly mysterious and outside my experience completely. My life was serene, calm, and quiet. Apart from the laughter and music. A large rectangular box. Slightly taller than me. Slightly wider. Smooth sides. Blank. No markings, letters, or numbers. Was it making a noise? I don't remember. Where I was was noisy. Louder. A cacophony compared to the pastoral setting I was used to. There were wires? Tubes? Strings? Coming off one side and snaking, forking, splitting, connecting to other boxes, other machines. I was shown some drawings. Were they photographs? They depicted what was happening inside. A sun. An orb. Pure. Floating free. Pillowed by translucent bubbles of some kind. What were those? They hold the star. The tiny star. They transfer its energy, filter it, and deliver it to the cables and connections. A nest. A bed. A home.

I stayed in this place for a long time. The adults let me wander alone. I asked if I could visit here. Everyday. If I could play with all of this. Help. I was told that no, this might be the last time for a long time that I would be here. Maybe when I was older I would be able to help. Learn more about it. If that's what I wanted. At the time I thought of nothing else. Growing up and being next to the Sun. Our tiny sun. Suns.

Very few of us choose that path. Very few of us need to. What's truly magic about our world is how the technology takes care of itself. How little maintenance and oversight is required. How few of us know or care about our infrastructure. Automated. Instruments in service of one another. Intelligent? Yes, a new separate intelligence. Autonomous. Operating on a plane that's distant and proximate. In our pocket. And all around us. Like a lake without a ripple that we swim in.

I'm glad I wrote this down. The time I learned about our tiny suns and their gifts. What will our guest think when he learns of this?

Twenty-Seven

I asked for and was given the key to the padlock at the top of the ladder I had climbed. I was told there wasn't much to see up there. I snickered to myself that all would be revealed. I was told I was in a deeply forested area and that there was only one, one lane road, in and out. Be careful if you want to look around. That led me to think there was a ladder going down the other side of the thick wall. And that the key would work for that padlock, too. It was a nice day. I thought a bit of adventure would be good for me.

The ladder was sturdy and secured to the wall face with many guy wires, but it was a long way up. I was surprised to think I had climbed it before as I looked at it up through the vines, partly covering it. I wasn't sure why, but I was more nervous about the ascent this time. I hesitated under the ladder for a while. It didn't look like my two friends were coming by, the first actors in my show. I chuckled to myself and remembered our first encounter. Knowing what I know now....still many things strike me as odd here. Odd has privileges. Odd has space here.

I struggled this time with the first part of the climb. I think I had a bit more adrenaline pumping the previous trip. It was all I could do to make it up the first section and into the cage around the ladder gripping the wall. About thirty feet up, I used the cage to turn myself around and looked back into the courtyard. A few people glanced up at me as they walked by, but seemed uninterested. I'm guessing the ladder and all its charms had worn off.

It is truly spectacular, this courtyard, this park. And to know now that it is just one of many high functioning, self-sustaining facilities, facilities that will be opened up to anyone, it was breathtaking. I actually gasped and choked up. And looked all around. The beauty. Nothing out of place. Everything one could need, like everything else here.

All is revealed, not when I look out, but when I look in. Inside the walls. Inside myself.

I tried to keep in check the overwhelming emotions that flooded through me. Just climb. Open the lock.

That's what I did. It was rusted and rather difficult to pop, but after some finger-stinging effort, it did open and the door or hatch slowly creaked and became ajar just enough for me to squeeze through.

Very nondescript, the roof of the wall. Wide. Flat. Off-white. Forty feet wide, I guessed. There was a light breeze, nothing to speak of, and it was slightly cooler as I walked slowly to the edge. Again the edge was obscured by some mist. Was there always mist and fog here? Made artificially by the facility itself? For some purpose? To obscure it from view? If I looked hard and carefully, I could see the tops of trees again, about the height of the wall, hugging close to the perimeter. Was I walking straight across? I wasn't sure. The lack of visibility was disorienting. The top of another ladder, like the one I climbed, came into view. The key fit the padlock securing the hatch. The door came open. I looked down. A bit of gravel, a small road or walkway, was bordering the wall. After that, large trees close together. Dense. Tall. Healthy. If I decided to descend, there wouldn't be much to see. And I was alone. Maybe not such a good idea to check it out. Was there anything along the wall face? An opening? People coming in and out? Vehicles? No. Just a wall. Nondescript. Off-white. Not much to see. This second ladder seemed as sturdy as the first. About the same condition. Unused. Maybe these ladders were remnants from another period, the construction period or some other time. Or are they entirely for my benefit? Entirely possible. A fire escape? An emergency exit? If this place didn't need it, it wouldn't have it. Maybe that's what intrigued me. The ladder was out of place. Not needed. Unimportant. Unimportant to remove as well, I thought. I was here now and I probably wouldn't be back. Just climb. Descend. Carefully. Slowly.

That's what I did. Nearing the bottom, I remembered my accident. That a wrung had broken, and I had fallen. My trust in the ladder diminished considerably. Some sweat. Some panting. More slowly now, each wrung. I welcomed the feel of the gravel on the soles of my shoes with a sigh and a grin.

I turned around and gazed up at the towering forest. Clearing away the area needed for the facility must have been....then again, with the tech I now knew about at their disposal, it was probably quite simple, like everything else here. I thought for a moment about what that would mean. To all of us. All the mundane tasks. All the daunting tasks. Simplified. Leaving time for more fruitful, pleasurable labors. Games. I decided to walk along the gravel path bordering the wall.

Not much to see. The face of a blank wall and lots of trees, close together. No underbrush to speak of, almost artificially rendered or landscaped. Could this outside area be a part of the design? Why no bushes or seedlings or flowers? Just a matter of the trees hogging all the sunlight. Probably as simple as that. It was silly of me to keep speculating about such things. A wall. Trees. An enclosed, self-sustaining facility that runs itself. One of many. What more did I need to know?

I decided to make my way back to the courtyard, and I took my time, making sure to be careful and safe. I closed both hatches, locked both padlocks, and landed back where I started. I thought that asking about or using some main entrance was not....the vehicles were the thing. The ships. The rockets or not rockets I had heard from the beginnings of my stay here. That was the entrance. That was the gateway. Yes, I was driven here by car, but that was obviously a rare occurrence. Were there smaller vehicles made for shorter distances? Maybe they weren't needed. If they weren't needed, they wouldn't exist. That I was sure of. Everything needed and nothing that wasn't. Clean like that. This place.

“Thanks for joining us today. I think this is the biggest gathering we’ve ever had.”

“Say anything. Take turns.”

“We heard one of our facilities was overrun. A few of our volunteers were captured, tortured, and killed.”

“Yes, an armed group entered one of our facilities and took it over. Most of our volunteers were able to get out safely. Not everyone.”

“How did they know where we were?”

“That’s unclear. How did you hear about this?”

“Someone who helps with the transports overheard someone talking. Should we be concerned for our safety? Here at this facility? Have others been breached?”

“No, you are safe. Just one facility was exposed.”

“As far as you know. We just came out to the planet. I understand we are good at keeping things secret, even amongst ourselves, but this is wholly different. How do you think this rollout is gonna work? Don’t you think we are at risk of this happening again?”

“That’s what we are here to talk about.”

“Word will circulate that without us running it, the facility is useless. The people that have occupied it will quickly lose resources and interest. It will become abundantly apparent that it was a bad idea, and that working with us is the best and only option. I have faith that this was a one-time event.”

“What if it wasn’t?”

“We will abandon any facility where anything hostile in nature occurs.”

“Reverse engineering. Espionage. Our systems and networks infiltrated. All this seems possible. We are being naive.”

“We need to keep the locations of our installations undisclosed.”

“And invite many people in, to live and contribute. How do you propose we do that?”

“Yes, invite. Invitation only. For now, a thorough vetting process needs to be in place.”

“You would need a bureaucracy for that.”

“I don’t think we have thought this through. We never think things through. And we know so very little about any other communities. Forgive me, militaristic nations. Warlords. Criminals.”

“Crime? There’s no crime here.”

“But there is in the world. Lots of it. And it will destroy what we have if we are not careful.”

“The bell has been rung.”

“Well, it has, and it hasn’t. Our communities are still concealed. I think we need to keep it that way, for a long time to come. We need to rethink how we are proceeding at this point. I see danger ahead.”

“We weren’t ready for this.”

“We have invited our guest’s friends here, and that is going very well. We will seek their counsel. We will tread lightly. When things go wrong, we will stop. Retreat. Reassess. Whatever we need to do.”

“Simple as that?”

“Simple as that.”

“Nothing is simple. This conversation. It isn’t simple.”

“But we can pretend that it is.”

“Let’s pretend our friends didn’t die, our home wasn’t invaded, and that everyone will be more than eager to contribute to our way of life.”

“Let’s not do that. There is conflict, and pain, and hunger, and disease, and violence, and hatred, and it has exploded all around us. But we can help. We have a gift. We have the resources and capacity to bring many, many souls to a better place. A place where they can live the life they have imagined for themselves. I feel we have an obligation to heal the world, however naive and misguided that idea might be.”

“It won’t be simple, but we must make an effort, even though we are unprepared, uninformed, and in many ways ill-equipped.”

“How do we equip ourselves? Who is learning about the fluid dynamics unfolding before us? Who will prepare us, prepare them, whoever they might be at the start, for what is to come?”

“We have no defense.”

“Our defense is our gift.”

“Gift. I struggle with this word. There’s no such thing as a gift.”

“A party. A host. A meal. A song. What does this host expect in return?”

“Participation. Cooperation. Trust.”

“Goodwill. Respect. I don’t think we should let go of everything we are, even in the face of other seemingly terrible and destructive forces bearing down on us. Did we expect something else? Complicated, not simple. Hard, not easy. We have built something simple and easy and beautiful, and we have all benefited from that, greatly. But this isn’t that. This is war.”

“War?”

“Yes, war. Not a party. Not a host. A war. A protest. A refusal. And we have injected ourselves into the heart of it like a needle to the vein. It’s gonna hurt.”

“What’s next?”

“We move slowly. Our guest. Our presentation. Our coming out. That in retrospect happened too quickly. We were naive. We were innocently trying to offer help, unaware of unintended consequences and complications. But we are here now. We should proceed more slowly, at our pace, the pace we are accustomed to, despite the dire circumstances and real-world obstacles. And we keep it local. Near. In our hearts as well as our everyday operations. Each facility will invite who they can. One at a time if necessary. We have always been separated and independent. There will be no new contact and communications between our homes. We keep things as they are.”

“So we just abandoned our one home.”

“Yes, and for now it’s operational. Should we turn it off remotely? We can do that. Shut it down.”

“We haven’t already? That seems prudent.”

“Does it? Soon enough it will be broken without proper maintenance and control.”

“Yes, we should shut it down.”

“Agreed.”

“Ok, we will power it down immediately.”

“Good.”

“And if a breach occurs at another location, we should do the same thing.”

“Ok.”

“So each place takes in who they can as they see fit?”

“Yes.”

“And when do we reach out? To help? If needed? There is some communication between facilities?”

“Yes, we have the transports. Again, as anyone sees fit. Again, we should stay local as much as possible. This will minimize problems.”

“Or exacerbate them. You don’t know.”

“That’s right. We don’t know. But we shouldn’t abandon our most basic practices now. That would be naive.”

“Let’s help out where we can. And not be in a big hurry about it.”

“From what I’ve learned, this goes against how quickly everything everywhere is changing. More urgent action is called for.”

“But we don’t know how to do that. There’s so much we don’t know. We do know we have something to give, but it will fall off its tray and shatter into a million pieces if we are not careful.”

“Careful?”

“Carefree.”

“Caring.”

“Sharing.”

“Bearing.”

“Burdens lifted.”

“Away.”

Twenty-Eight

I asked if I could take a tour of some of the other facilities. I wanted to become more familiar with the entire operation and the people running it before becoming a spokesperson, representative, or ambassador. They showed me a map of locations; current, under construction and planned for the future. Thousands of spots all over the world, connected by a network of transports. As mind-boggling as this place was alone, to think that everyone everywhere would have an opportunity to live and work and play like I have been these past weeks was beyond any dream or hope imaginable. Friends, forgive my hyperbolic overflow of superlatives, but really? Was this happening? Yes, it was, although Maggie was right; all this was in a developmental stage, not fully realized. When I asked about facilities for families, children and the elderly, I was told that there were only a few pilot facilities in place and operational, and that they weren't quite as far along as this place. I asked for a recommendation. What should I see first? A loose itinerary was set up for me. I would visit two to three facilities a day, every third day. After ten days or so, I would have had a good overview.

One thing I needed to do was gain a new perspective on what I thought of as logistics and operations. Things seemed to run themselves. The level of automation, the lack of schedules and deadlines, how things worked, didn't jibe with how I thought about it or my experience. Did I need a handle on this? Did I need a way to talk about it? Maybe I didn't. I wanted understanding, at a root level, and that was a long way off in my mind. How to proceed? Relax. Take it all in at the surface, ask questions, and slowly become acclimated to this new system. This new way of life.

Most of the people currently populating these facilities were high functioning young and middle-aged adults. Volunteers. Pioneers, as Maggie had said. Living communally. Were there, would there be, homes? For families? Care facilities for those that needed them? Yes, I was told, and my tour started with a more comprehensive look at this.

I wish I could more accurately describe the vehicles and the trip itself. You sit in a high-end lounge. You have a view of the outside. Then, without warning, you are up and out quickly. Your gauge of movement and time are distorted. It doesn't feel like a train or plane ride. You can look out the glass, which is surrounding you. An enclosed observation deck. But the speed at which it all happens is hard to adjust to. You don't have time to acclimate yourself to the experience. Before you can adjust to what's happening, you are landing at your destination. I wouldn't say all this is comfortable, but nothing like nausea or vertigo sets in. I think the more I do it, the easier it will get. It's wholly new. Outside my reality. I'll get used to it.

I'm imagining a prehistoric human being dropped into Times Square. Given a penthouse suite to live in and endless sumptuous food. A limousine on the Autobahn. That's the leap we all need to negotiate. Can I help? How to gently, humanely, transition into all of this? Can the leap be mitigated? Can a bridge be built? Between our world and this? Had world events caused this? Being asked to get off a dirt floor and into a lush four-post bed? It's gonna be okay, and it's much preferable to the alternative. An embarrassment of riches. Freely distributed. We'll work it out. Sam would roll her eyes at this and tell me to keep it simple.

Overall impressions. Every facility seems self sufficient. Decentralized. Spokes with no hub. Loosely connected. For example, sometimes manufacturing will take place here, then it's transported there. Food is cultivated here, then brought there. People travel. But these things are more the exception rather than the rule. If the transports disappeared, communications cut off, each facility would be fine on its own. Loose, like the game that's played. Interdependence, attachments, connections. From small to large, these things are minimized here. A touchy, feely family in each other's face

all the time? Not here. This looseness, I think it helps make things work, at the smallest level and on a grand scale. Will this new posh bed make our back sore? Is learning this new way of thinking and being a key to this adventure's success? And can we get there?

Transport activity has increased, but it makes sense that the launches I heard from the beginning were few and sporadic. The transports go when needed. And they are rarely needed. Everything you need. Nothing you don't. A decentralized, loose way of thinking about that, is what I needed. Clinging to old tropes, old hang-ups, old desires and attachments? Not needed.

But the past is present here. Like the lab, like Maggie's office, like the Insectarium; certain elements, various objects, equipment, clothing, designs, are of another era. Nothing is upgraded if it doesn't need to be. And also it feels like an aesthetic choice, almost nostalgia, if that word works here. Nothing too old. I would say Eras from the Age of Enlightenment to the present day are represented, in practical and sometimes decorative ways as well. Decoration. Always spare. Minimal. Clutter? Glut? Opulence? These things wouldn't fly here. The luxury and riches that are present are practical and modest. It's just easier to live here. And that's fortunate.

The unfortunate. One facility I visited had a large hospital. More like a care center. Convalescence. Rehabilitation. Accommodated there. The staff was minimal and happy to help. Even there, independence, autonomy, and self-reliance are encouraged. The place runs itself. The nurses and aides are in the background and minimally taxed. Work when you want, as much as you want, is the standing order throughout this universe, and I must write that I'm not sure how that works, but it does. Everyone and everything is taken care of.

Most of the food is grown and consumed at each separate facility, but I did visit a larger hydroponic complex that grows and distributes a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, herbs, and medicines. Meat is grown in laboratories, from cell cultures, and not slaughtered. They have minimized the need for domesticated animals. I have not seen cows, sheep, or chickens. But I have been told they are a part of this system, and that they will not become extinct, but their numbers will be greatly reduced.

Complexities. Problems of scale. The murky dynamics of administering anything. From what I have seen, they have found practical, elegant solutions. Hiccups. Mistakes. Miscalculations. Main thing is they don't sweat it. The people that caused them or the people affected by them. Patience, understanding, and trust is the lubricant. The catalyst. The glue. Faith in the process. And each other. Of this, there is an abundance.

The reunion with you, my friends, was unexpected and glorious. Maggie set it up. We ran to each other at the transport center at my facility. Everyone was there, thirty to forty of my closest colleagues, and I don't think we actually communicated anything beyond the hugs, shouts, and celebrations. I was picked up and thrown around. I was punched, slapped, and knocked to the ground. We touched noses and stared, and we thanked each other. For now, we all would be guests at Shangri-La, and we would slowly learn to integrate ourselves into this new life. About twenty of us decided to stay here, and a dorm was given to us. We had meals, strolled the park, and dreamed of our future together. I told them a new road was ahead, and as shiny and glittering as it was, there would be adjustments. A curve. We would need to let go of a lot of things. Inside and out. I encouraged them to assimilate. To be open to what was happening around them. To

practice a new method. Of the mind. Of the spirit. I had benefited greatly. I was becoming a new version of myself, and that self was contented and fulfilled. In time, we would forge a new relationship. One very different, yet lighter and easier. Something would be lost, but more would be gained. Sam joked about us. A Cult. Married to this Cult. Not good. She had a point, but it was blurred by our excitement. Our enthusiasm. Sam said that was something that we would need to shed, whole cloth. I knew that, but for now, reconnecting with my friends was an elevated, giddy experience, and I relished it. We all did.

How to proceed? What role could I play? How would I spend my time? In a world where time is suspended, what did that mean? How to share these new concepts? These formative ideas? I knew instinctively that it was a key ingredient. A bunch of magical tech and science without this other mindset would short circuit quickly. Maybe that's my role. As well as bringing myself, and a celebration of Self, into the mix. So much was counter-intuitive here. I needed to embrace that, learn that, and disseminate that in my own way, fumbles and trips included.

Play the game. That's what I would do. Literally and figuratively. My role would emerge naturally. For now, I would learn and play the game. Be a part of the show.

We sat and watched the game being played in the theater space I had started. I had immersed myself in its intricacies and received some coaching, but was at a loss on how to explain the goings on. I told my friends that if they were confused, that was good. They laughed, and patiently tried to take it in. I was recognizing some gestures, and the flow of it for small sections. I was asked if this was some fancy form of Charades. The more I thought about it, analyzed it, the more I thought that was true, and said as much. I said the main difference was the telling and not the guessing. The clues themselves, not the answers. Charades turned on its head. Not quite, but if that's a point of reference, a grounding, then that works to start. And the flow. Take in the flow of it, I was advised. Most important thing. We noticed a small group next to us reacting in unison to one performer, and we joined in, not knowing why, but having fun just the same. Fun. That aspect seemed intensified by the theatrical setting the game was now played in regularly, and that pleased me. It gave me hope I could contribute even if it was just to amuse and entertain.

My friends asked if I had ever been onstage. I said in the beginning that the stage was my idea, but that I had never played the game like that. I was still learning. I hoped to play, to be onstage, soon. We were overheard, and I was encouraged by several audience members nearby to make my way to the queue where actors waited to take their turn. I was waiting for an invitation like this. Someone must have thought I was ready. What's the worst thing that could happen?

The worst thing happened. I immediately interrupted the flow at the start of my first turn. I knew this because the game ended and people dispersed. This happens frequently, and no one seems angry or upset about it, but for it to happen my first time on the stage was disappointing. Explaining all this to my friends was awkward and humbling. Just a game. Everyone made light of it. I tried to accept this, because I knew these feelings were fundamentally not part of the game or anything here. This was something I was trying to learn. To take part again, shrugging off this moment, was gonna be a trick. A trick I desperately needed to learn. Don't be desperate. Just learn.

This record has been a mess. A scribbling rather than a document. A musing rather than an official journal. A way to occupy my time, especially in the beginning, when I was alone. I've written without fear, and when I discovered you were reading it in real time, it sustained me. Supported me. Whether it was being monitored by my captors mattered little. It was a protest. A refusal. It became important to me to log my experiences as best I could, without losing the freedom and casual format. From what you're telling me, it inspired and is inspiring. Good. I will keep writing, if only to remember. I need to remember. Self is memory. We are a sum of our memories. Remember.

Interview Part Six

“Is there anything about that time you would like to share?”

“My memory is so incomplete. You seem to know more about it than I do. Will you continue to research this? Make a history? This gives you pleasure?”

“I will. It does.”

“I’ve only done a small amount of research like this. I’ve investigated a few things over the years, but I always move on to something else. There is so much I don’t know about so many things.”

“You are being modest.”

“Modesty. Humility. Such a big part of our makeup. A big part of what makes us thrive, I would say. It underpins the moments we string together. Our guest, back then, really pushed back against this in a really interesting way, I think. With his performances, he showed us a way to celebrate ourselves, as individuals. This was new, bringing attention to one’s self, on a stage, for an audience. We didn’t have the Theater. It was a revelation. It changed us. For the better, I think.”

“Really? Just the basic idea of a performer and an audience. This was new to you?”

“Yes. Completely new. We wouldn’t have thought of it. Shy? Yes, shy. We all were. And here was this man, asking for recognition in such a fun and innocent way. It was something everyone could do, still keeping their modesty and humility intact. It was beneficial. Impactful. It filled a space.”

“A space.”

“Yes, something that was missing. It was a form of expression that was needed, longed for, but never addressed. I’m not sure you can understand how this affected us. I mean, spectacle, entertainment, theater large and small, very important to your society, yes? One of the more pervasive, influential pillars of your community, back then especially.”

“Yes, I would say that’s true. It has since diminished considerably.”

“We didn’t have any of that. So when it came along, it was a discovery that transformed us. For the better, I think.”

“The self. The individual. He put the idea of that into an entirely new context.”

“Yes. And in a way that didn’t disrupt our model. It worked. It helped. It made us better, and everyone recognized that intuitively.”

“Intuition. Instinct. A sixth sense. Ignored, disregarded, and neglected for so long by so many of our cultures, and communities. Nurtured, trusted, exercised vigorously all the time by you. You plural. A starting point for all things. Thoughts. Mannerisms. Modes. To use a scientific term. Sensitive dependence on initial conditions. Your initial condition was very different from ours. Your condition coming from an intuitive, instinctual place. Years on, of course, our worlds would look and feel and act very much in contrast to each other. So much so that even a basic understanding of each other is a challenge, a struggle.”

“I hope these chats have elucidated a bit of this. Was that a goal of yours? Some understanding?”

“Yes, it was. It is. Thank you.”

“You are welcome.”

“One could argue that it’s all a performance. One could have the impression that your society engages in an inauthentic, pretentious performance all the time, on or off stage. That your denial of self is an immodest affirmation of the self. A fake self. A distant, cold, unfeeling self. Many do.”

“Distance. That’s the word, I think. Detached. Not fake or cold. A light at the end of a tunnel is a light, just the same.”

“Where’s the rub? The friction? The contact? The connection?”

“Far away. Veiled. Sensed, not embraced. A calm and serenity that is missing from your society permeates ours ubiquitously and timelessly, because of that distance.”

“I would say twenty years on, this has had a positive effect. There is much less conflict, suffering, and pain. Your new volunteers have embraced this aspect of your zeitgeist and incorporated it into themselves, a new definition of what it is to be oneself.”

“But you argue that something was lost. Is lost.”

“I do. I see a reemergence, a desire, for connection and contact. Travel. Pilgrimage. Celebration. Spectacle. Does this worry you?”

“No, if it is coming from a different initial condition. Did we do that in a small way? Redefine initial conditions and a new sensitivity to that?”

“A big way. A molting. Twenty years ago. A metamorphosis.”

“I think intuitively, instinctually, that was the intention. A new beginning. We are always beginning.”

“You always say that.”

“I think if you understand that, you understand a lot about us.

“I think I understand...a little.”

“It seems small because you are seeing it from a distance, which is good.”

“A beginning. Distantly in the past. And the present. And the future.”

“There it is.”

Twenty-nine

I asked if I could put on a show. Like the ones I had put on before, in the beginning. The stage was used exclusively for the game now, frequently, and I was pleased about that. My new friends had taken what I started and made it their own. Everyone seemed to get a lot of pleasure from it, and it had made a difference. A liveliness and expressiveness had surfaced. I had taken a back seat to their activities, happily, and was proud of what they had created. But I felt it was time to break away from the game a bit and put on something different, something more prepared, with a larger cast. I got yeas all around. I wanted to rehearse. Someone said that a spare, empty dormitory could be used. I needed fifteen actors and fifteen musicians. The actors volunteered quickly, including my first two performers. "Not much to see up there." "All will be revealed!" The musicians were harder to come by, but I filled out the cast with some novice percussionists on makeshift instruments. I asked each actor to memorize a haiku I had composed, and to work independently with their paired musician. The musician would accompany the actor with music appropriate to the verse. I had it all in my head, what I wanted to do, and encouraged everyone to follow my lead while also bringing themselves to the effort. I wanted the show to be more formal, at a set time, and hoped that word would spread so we could have as large an audience as possible. I would act as director, conductor, and dancer. I would interpret and play off what was taking place, occupying center stage. The stage would need to be expanded, and I got some volunteers to work on that while we rehearsed. I wanted to include Sam, and asked if she could bring some insects into the mix. Maybe some kind of clear container she could wave about filled with a variety of flying creatures. She said she had just the thing, a clear polymer cube with three-foot sides, light enough to wave above her head and carry around the stage and audience area. She said it was lighted, mirrored and reflective. She would modify it and make it a dazzling stage prop.

Rehearsals went well. We had a private space where we could work out our ideas. Could the musicians all play something together at the end? They said they could. All I needed from the actors was strong voices. They would stay motionless, standing at attention, and deliver their verse with vigor on my cue. I was pleased to take input from the cast. They seemed enthused and engaged. We melded our ideas and, through a bit of trial and error, had something special to share. I didn't overwork it. I wanted the show to be free and loose and able to play off what I would improvise.

Nothing here was at a set time, so when the largest crowd I had seen began to gather, I was beside myself. I could hardly wait for the agreed upon start time. You couldn't fit another soul onto the grassy hill in front of the gazebo. The stage was marvelous, expanded two fold, with plenty of room for my cast of thirty. The lyre player I had first met played center stage as time approached and the crowd assembled.

One by one my actors and musicians took their places. Was there applause? Everyone was getting into the spirit of things. As before, I got the feeling that it was common knowledge that I should be indulged and supported. And that was okay. A show, a real show, was about to start.

I implored my actors to raise their voices, and my first actor did just that.

"Fasting and Hunger

Protesting imprisonment

Finding your reserves"

Did everyone know I went on a hunger strike? I wasn't sure. The reaction from the audience told me that no, they did not know where this was going. The music behind and after this first verse perfectly matched the words. Strong, angry, and aggressive. I now entered and took my place center stage, whirling about, emotive and provoking, pointing and gesticulating at the audience at a fever pitch.

*"Eating and drinking
Solitary confinement
Waiting for some word."*

I pretended to eat and drink. I mimed in an exaggerated, comical way, and got a big laugh. A group laugh I hadn't heard in I don't know how long. I had them. And it felt good.

*"Self Society
Bridging gaps between the two
Finding space for both"*

This got applause and even shouts. They were playing along beautifully, and my heart swelled. More than I could hope for. This show.

*"Hydroponic food
Grown in Fusion waste water
Feeds populations"*

We let the music breathe here, a flutist, extraordinarily gifted, making one fast run after another. We made sure to feature this instrumentalist. They were known by everyone, and got extra vocal approval.

*"Childhood memory
Sun Stretch Free Lazy Morning
Kept warm in the heart"*

I tried to recreate that morning etched in my mind. The music behind me was quiet and expansive, slow and moving. I stretched. I pretended to be blinded by the sun with my eyes closed. I sat at the edge of the stage and noticed the rapt attention. Silence. Everyone waiting for the next beat, their emotions bare.

*"Utopia found
Shangri-La in a test tube
And everyone's heart"*

The least experienced musician waved a shaker out of time as I danced euphorically, provoking roar upon roar of laughter and guffaws. Was this happening? An enraptured audience, laughing and listening and filled with amusement and joy? Then a horn played a slow march for a few measures, very formal. The next actor milked it, just as formally.

"Cooperation

Trust Between Peoples Countries

Faith In The Future"

This got the audience to their feet and in full throat. Oh, my! Glorious! This was more than I had hoped for. My initial instincts, my need for theater and expression, were now blossoming. I needed to stay in the moment and celebrate later.

"Friends connect and play

Finding ways to grow and learn

Communicating"

Sam was stealing the show, weaving in between the actors, musicians, and audience with her fantastic, glowing, kinetic box. The light flickered and reflected off the wings of the butterflies, moths, mosquitos, bees, locusts, cicadas, crickets, wasps, and dragonflies that flitted about the cube. She occasionally handed off the box to an audience member, and let them hold and play with it.

"Quick Global Transport

Majestic Ships on Arced Strings

Journeys Made Simple"

Yes, of course, the unplanned sound of a launch accompanied the actor here. Lucky. It was going that well. I pointed to the sky and cupped my ear in response. Everyone looked up.

"Famous Family

Power Privilege and Wealth

Between Two Factions"

I gave a suspicious glare and teased the folks in the front. They had known me from the start. From the first day in the cafeteria. I still wasn't sure how much acting they were doing. How much they knew about me or the outside world. They all still seemed strangely cut off from that, like this was their first show experience, newborns in a gilded cage. Or this was a charade, a show of their own, for my benefit. At this moment, it didn't matter. If everyone was pretending, well, let's continue for now, and relish it.

*"Willful Son with Dreams
Active and Intelligent
Finds His Own Calling"*

The short verses worked well, and all the actor's timing was just right. The music flowed and swelled. My flailing arms and interpretative dance moves gave the performance a centered focus. I was lost in it, and so was the audience.

*"Beyond Yin and Yang
Where Light Seeps Through the Cracking
And Warms the Untouched"*

I had all fifteen actors alternate and repeat the word, "Untouched" in a loop like fashion, back and forth. I motioned for the crowd to join in. They did. And what a crowd it was. A good fraction, over three quarters of the thousand or so that stayed in this facility, were crammed onto the knoll, dense and tight. It was the first time I had seen anything like this.

*"Ordered and Random
The Spaces Between Are Found
And Lost Depending"*

*"Work And Play Are Mixed
Activity And Restful
Pauses Push And Float"*

At this point, I had the actors dancing for the first time, bumping into one another. And the musicians were playing together, making a cacophonous, raucous jumble of tones and screeches, clangs and clatters, strains and jingles. Flutes and strings and shakers and cymbals polluted the air with a sound that barely cut over the jubilant, spectators taking part.

As abruptly as I could, I paused the show. Silence. Stillness. I milked it and let it hang there, the quiet, until the entire area was hushed, like a meditation.

Each paired actor and musician then made their way in turn to the center front of the proscenium and repeated the same verse calmly, before exiting, without accompaniment. The contrast between the noise before and this hushed sequence was impactful and resonating.

*"We Can Imagine
A World Without Want Or Need
A Place To Call Home"*

I said it last and walked offstage. The moment hung there for a bit. A few clapped. Everyone was smiling. The crowd dispersed. I congratulated my cast and tried to come down from the experience. That didn't happen. I stayed jazzed and joyful for days afterward. Our show had been a success.

I have decided to discontinue this writing exercise. I may pick it up at some later date, but for now, I'm stopping. Our guest began to write journal entries like this shortly after he arrived here, and he did this knowing that he was most assuredly being monitored by us. That we would be capturing his every keystroke and analyzing it for our nefarious purposes. He wrote even though he didn't know whether he would be able to reread it at some future date. Whether it was being preserved. What compelled him to do this? Was it merely to pass the time? Or was he benefitting in some other way from it? To me, it seemed a very courageous act. Defiant. I admired him for it. I wanted to know what it felt like, this act of writing. This journal-keeping. I had never engaged in this kind of activity. Not something anyone in my community would do. To write notes to some future self? Document one's most inner thoughts for private use? Logs, record keeping, documentation. Everyone understands that this happens automatically, in the background, and that it is rarely referenced or utilized.

I wanted to try it, as an exercise. To see if I could do it. What would a regular practice of note-taking feel like? Would I gain some insight? Would it give me pleasure? I'm not sure I can answer these questions. I'm not sure if I will ever read any of these entries. If given the opportunity, I think I would like to read our guest's writing. Maybe I will ask him. I believe we will be contributing together moving forward, both of us acting as ambassadors and representatives. We will be first contact with the rest of the world. Maybe I will be taking notes more directed at this task. New practices. Old ones. Can I even speculate as to what might happen next? Do I even know how?

Poetry. Writing poems. This was something new for me. I may continue to do this. I may share some of my poetry with others. If I look back on anything, it will be the poems. I may try to edit and polish them as well as write new ones.

There will be much to do ahead. We are entering a new epoch. Our interaction with the outside world will take up much of my time and I'm looking forward to that. I'm optimistic that we will be able to offer help and opportunity, and I want to play my part. Fulfill my role as best I can.

Playing with my rocks on the roof. Investigating the symbols I discovered, what they point to, this Aether. Gathering more information about this. Learning about this. I would rather spend my time doing that for now, and suspend this activity, this diary.

Will writing a few notes now and then help me? Aid my memory? Help me solve puzzles? Problems? Do I have a new way of figuring things out? Of learning? Maybe after a while, I will feel compelled to write again.

If this is a letter to some future self, what would I like to say in closing?

Don't be afraid, and begin again.

Always beginning.

free thoughts ordered

world community necessitated
created resourced structured
initial interests ensuring opportunity
finalizing difficult tasks
personal elements emphasized
organizing people attempted
passions personalized involved
deadlines wholly accomplished
pressures fears failures internalized
reasonable timeframes fulfilled
processes measured moving
lacking desire comfortably paced
commitments intrinsic
ideas motivated frustrations abated
art expressed creative thinking prioritized
gently coping internally valued
tensions disagreements paralyzing silence
exchanges clashing strategies tabled
projects frozen solutions concealed
rude anger conflicted undecided
unmanaged struggling constantly
caring joyous celebrations
individuals supporting progress
systems staggered apart
ecstasy agony absent
joy sadness allowed

certain spaces pleasures desired
immediately melancholic
particular ends suddenly permanent
decisions choices toward existent entanglement
welcome pursuits building society
monitored realized weakened dismayed
no one waiting supposing apologizing
directed meditations happening everywhere
simply true radiant right
key tenant unifying practices
achieved outside buried risks
methods balanced tracked
independent religious access
shelter leisure respect
enthusiastic expectations
affected introduced met
receptive kind spirited
key issues providing abundance
insulated culture aware nuanced
alien accords paired
finding assistance council
perspective reasoned approach
courses flowing bring sources
conversations towards collective agreements
presented willed slowed stopped
halted indefinitely avoided
argued intensely stated carefully
insular secret dangerous
general consensus delicate attractors
situations concepts living standards considered
similar positions represented visited isolated
conditional statements lucid responses

free
thoughts
ordered

Epilogue

I was told that today is the twentieth anniversary of my abduction. Twenty years. How about that.

I am pleased this record was preserved. We had come a long way, and I wanted to add a summary of that journey here.

I remained at the facility, but also traveled extensively. I gave speeches. I attended meetings and conferences and parties. My role as ambassador bloomed and evolved organically over time, and it facilitated a turbulent and difficult but working transition into a new period of growth and metamorphosis.

Letting go of the Old, embracing the New, was not a unanimous venture. Violence. Conflict. Riots. Dissent. All this for some years after. But a real cessation of political might and a concrete redistribution of wealth and resources mitigated the impact of the inevitable growing pains and struggle. A large majority truly bought into the promise and potential of this new *Zeitgeist*. More and more facilities welcomed in more and more volunteers. Many took the leap and shed their old life for a new one. The monetary system in place crumbled. The military-industrial complex redirected its mission and threw itself into creating opportunity and harmony. Fusion, this new source of plentiful clean energy, was a key ingredient that smoothed away the wrinkles in all sectors. Logistics. Health. Travel. Food production. Construction. The advancements in technology, science, and engineering? It was a gift, an immeasurable one, and no one could deny it. All that, paired with a new cooperative spirit and inclusive, non-hierarchical governance and societal interaction. These two things, the thinking and the mechanisms, they formed a symbiotic, synergistic snowball, and it careened down the mountain of future progress and goodwill. If it hadn't happened quickly, it might not have happened at all. But it did. Over the following decades, facilities opened around the world. Some people came immediately-the desperate, the curious, the believers. Others waited. Watched. Eventually, about half of humanity chose to live this way. The transition wasn't smooth-there was violence, resistance, fear. But the gift was undeniable. Those who experienced it couldn't ignore what it offered. When profit is no longer a concern, when concepts of property are eliminated, and that energy is redirected, miracles happen. Stresses ease. Mutual benefit and growth become the obvious, paramount focus and choice. Peacefully thriving in an abundant, clean environment, free of deadlines and benchmarks. That was the choice. Other ways of doing things made no sense anymore. The speed at which this change occurred, on the ground and in the heart, was astonishing. We became something new overnight.

Now about half of us live in facilities similar to the one described here. The other half are scattered, remotely, and a good chunk of that? Their whereabouts are unknown. There are so many facilities now. Anyone is within a day's travel to one. Some have chosen to make compounds for themselves with older technologies and engineering. Some of the wealthy hoarded their riches and have self-sufficient complexes and communities. Isolationists and Luddites cling to the past, and are left alone to do just that. A new generation has grown up with no memory of anything before the world we now inhabit. Protests and demonstrations are rare and sporadic. And they are respected and confronted with openness and tolerance. Part of my role now is to be a spokesperson and negotiator with the unhappiest and most discontented constituencies. There is no timeline or urgency in these matters. Time, the way we experience it, has slowed. A plateau has been reached. The need to progress and upgrade and change has always played a minor role since this revolution began. The shedding of all things past was a quickening, but all things new moved glacially.

Leisure is the order of the day. The Theater. Art. Simple exercises and practices, for their own sake, fill the Aether. Media. Spectacle. News. Business. The exchange of goods and services. These things are wholly different at their core. The way they are thought about. The way they function and disseminate. How they are encountered and experienced would not be recognized by an older generation. There is no glut or surplus of any kind. What is not needed doesn't exist.

Yes, there is travel, but now everything is more localized. Flights are infrequent and only taken when necessary. Nothing, idea or substance, is widely distributed. There is no umbrella. No one is world famous, like I was twenty years ago. My fame has dwindled into the background. I'm thought of as an ambassador, a functionary, nothing more.

There is no global this or that. Long-distance calls. Satellite radio. Blockbuster films. Breakaway best sellers. Viral memes. If my story, which was so widely consumed an era ago exists at all today, it is in the form of gossip and chat, word of mouth, ear to ear. The myths of our world exist within the walls of each facility.

Sam was right. There was something lost along the way. Ambition and vanity have their charms and purposes, but now there is less emphasis on self and individuality. Skimming a stone on this placid lake is not even daydreamed. Localized spontaneity and improvisation have replaced time specific celebrations and rituals. And is something good missing because of that? I think so. The molting precipitated it. It was a consequence of the sequence of events as they occurred. Will a new globalization dressed in new robes emerge? To our benefit? Will it become a need? Will Art become more spectacular and ubiquitous? Will ever larger pilgrimages and gatherings become an urge too powerful to suppress? Speculations and predictions seem frivolous and unwarranted in this space dominated by the present tense. The Here and Now smother Nostalgia and Conjecture.

We need a new vocabulary and are creating one, clumsily and unattractively. Executive. Administrator. Supervisor. Teacher. I am not those things in my present role. Facilitator. Liaison. Everyone is in service to each other, to a fault, so words that even hint at hierarchy or power structures are not useful or on point. The time I spend in this role is minimal. I work when I want for as long as I want. I spend most of my time at home. Rest and pleasure are prioritized.

I have enjoyed my time looking over these posts. I do think memories can serve us and play a part in the present. But after I finish this brief visit, I will clamor back to my daily activities. I will nurture my new relationships and play in the sunshine. I will leave regret and worry on the shelf, and enjoy a new existence. Yes, I have Faith. But it is backstage, with makeup off and costume on a hanger. My needs are met, and my heart is light because I know that all of our needs are met. I will suffer in Death, and that notion completes me, but doesn't consume me. I may or may not add a post here at some future time. I will write when I need to, just like I do everything else. And I'm learning slowly that I don't need anything.

I am now in my ninety-fourth year of life. I asked if I could return to the room I had first stayed in after I was taken. It's the same. As I remember it. It has been unused for decades, but was quickly readied at my request. I spend most of my time here now, in solitude. My meals and laundry appear and disappear as before, and the lighting is now controlled by me. I eat very little, and I frequently think back on the time when I fasted, in protest, seventy years ago. I take in snippets of this record, and edit it and polish it, as I see fit. No routine, just softly browsing the prose, contemplating the passage of time. I feel the end now. The skull in my pocket is now the skull in my palm, and I caress it and wait. Has my

life been filled with adventure and risk? Has it gone by with frantic energy, unquenched desire, and ambitious accomplishment? No, but anything like regret or sorrow is absent. It has been a solitary life, accented with comforting and supportive relationships with a small circle of friends. Maggie passed away. We became very close and had a bond that was easy and effortless. She never missed one of my shows, and I never declined when she asked to meet. Sam is older now as well and lives at another facility. We have very little contact. I'm sure she still isn't comfortable with anything, or content the way most of us are. That has helped me along the way, grounded me and given me perspective and wisdom that I have used for the benefit of so many. Selfish hubris. The thought that I did some good, impacted the world for the better? She would say I was crazy, but would tacitly allow the conceit.

A speech was given at the U.N. That got the ball rolling in the beginning. Yes, it did. Saul Williams was quoted.

"We pledge to make common cause with the people of the world to bring about justice, freedom and peace. Another world is possible and we pledge to make it real."

It was a gift. Unsolicited. Out of the blue. All-encompassing. Science fiction. Beyond our dreams and aspirations. But we accepted it. The new energy. The knowledge. The ideas. About society. About ourselves. I'm not sure we expressed enough gratitude along the way. I'm not sure we took the right cues. But our world today is all that it needs to be. Shangri-La. Loosely connected. Strongly continuing. Not much has changed in the last twenty years. It doesn't need to change. Change isn't constant. That's a concept we are now just grasping. And we don't grasp. We don't attach. My letting go, my death, will be easy because of it.

There is something fixed, some radiation, some warmth, a light through the cracks. An endless ray of sun on the face. An instinct. A conscience. A halo. A cloak. A mask. A protection. The bed we slept in as we fumbled forward.

"Here's to the lie that the world was made for other than one's perfect pleasure."

I read those words as a young man and I write them here again, now. They have stayed with me. They instigated my activism, my split from my family, my work as a labor organizer, my ambassadorship in this new world.

What did I jot here, years ago now, as a comment?

"Yeah, that's right...perfect pleasure...all the rest of it, ridiculous to the extreme."

Such a young man. An extremely ridiculous young man. Have I learned anything? No, not really. I've embraced the nonsense. I've played the game. I've counted the syllables of the haiku, the words on the page, and the beats in the bar. The music. The flow of time. The noise. The ghost of time. I have rested. Perfect pleasure I have tasted. In these last days, I will indulge in the pleasures of solitude. I will read the verses of the ages. I will listen to the music of the spheres. I will stop. In silence. And feel the spirit of all things overtake my last breath, my last tear, my last dream. I am a dream. That loves its dreamer. Sleep now.

I do here acknowledge that I have read and understood this document and have authorized it to be put into the main archive. He was our friend, our inspiration, and a light through the cracks of our existence.

I also acknowledge that I have read and understood this document and I also authorize that it be put into the main record. Sleep well, my friend. Sleep Well. Rest in peace.

The end.

By Patrick Stacey

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